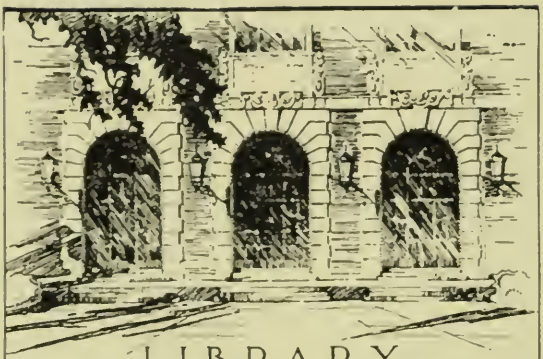
WOLFERN CHACE

A NOVEL

BY

ONE — WHO NOT UNKNOWN TO FAME,

YET DARES TO WRITE WITHOUT A NAME.



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WOLFERN CHACE:

A CHRONICLE OF

"Days that are No More."

A NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

One—who not unknown to fame.
Yet dares to write without a name.

Shadows! Oh, ye Shadows that before me pass;
We are all Shadows—Shadows on the grass.
I stand in the bright sunshine, upon this ancient lawn,
And muse in dreamy thought on the Shadows that are gone.

VOL. III.

London:
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1879.

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WOLFERN CHACE.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH nothing definite as to the time when the decisive battle would be fought was known by the general public, there was a strong impression in London that it was very imminent, and on the Sunday preceding the ever-memorable 18th of June, sermons suited to the peril of the time were preached in most of the churches and chapels throughout the three kingdoms. Our old friend, Dr. Maxwell, quaintly took

his text from the passage in Kings, describing the fight between David and Goliath, and with some appositeness; for then, as now, the English army was indeed but as a "David" to the continental "Goliath." The classical taste of our reverend friend drew him away from the Scriptural parable, and led him to enlarge chiefly on the splendid muster-roll of historical instances, wherein heroic bravery has set arithmetic at nought. Leonidas, at Thermopylæ; Horatius at the Bridge, although skilfully resuscitated for the occasion, evidently failed to awaken much of the heroic spirit of the "militia" audience, which formed a large contingent in the church; but when, coming down the ages, he arrived nearer home, and told tersely and well how the noble Wallace fought and died for his country; how Bruce held the pass single-handed against a whole clan, and won Bannockburn

against fearful odds; of how the Black Prince routed the overwhelming force of France at Cressy and Poictiers; and, later still, of Harry the Fifth's marvellous victory at Agincourt, one could see the old mastiff-blood asserting itself in the flash of the eye, the hard, firm set of the jaw, and the clenched hands that longed to grip a sword, a musket, a lance, or, better still, a Frenchman by the throat.

Then, when coming down the stream of history to the names of those recent battles, that were still ringing like clarions in the air, he told again the recent tales of Trafalgar, Aboukir, Torres-Vedras, Salamanca, Vittoria! I thought these rough-and-ready-soldiers of the people would have risen at him with a wild hurrah! and carried him bodily out of the pulpit on their shoulders to go and find some foemen worthy of their steel. I would have

laid long " odds " that if then and there, they could have been well led against double their number of French veterans, they would have given a very fair account of themselves. However, as there were no French veterans " convenient," the gallant fellows marched away from church to the inspiring strains of " The Girl I Left Behind Me," and were obliged to content themselves with glaring down ferociously on the fringe of little vulgar boys that frayed alongside the column, giving vent to shrill hurrahs.

Sir Geoffrey invited Dr. Maxwell and the rest of us to lunch in the Cottage garden, and the conversation, of course, ran chiefly on the all-absorbing topic of the war. The ladies being present, and listening with an intent and painful eagerness, we instinctively adopted a more hopeful tone in speaking of the probable consequences of Wellington's

defeat, than most of us felt. The truth was that, remembering how often our allies had been beaten, we none of us felt much confidence in any army but our own ; and it was a matter of deep regret, and a great increase of anxiety, to know that 9,000 of our Peninsular veterans had been sent over seas to battle with our cantankerous kinsmen in America. We had an especial distrust of "*Les braves Belges*," whose contingent formed numerically so large a portion of the Duke's army, for it was pretty well known that "*Les braves*" had a nasty trick of bragging before a battle, and bolting in the middle of it.

This was how O'Sullivan had put it in a letter I had just received from him, and which, as it contained some amusing blunders, and some still more amusing reasoning, I read aloud, thinking it would help to

enlighten the conversation and divert the ladies' thoughts from the impending nightmare.

It was dated from "the Cantonments, Nivelles," and began without any regard to the proprieties of "My dear so-and-so," but with the clown's exclamation of "here we are again! Well, yes, here we are, to a dead certainty, a deadly-lively certainty; but considerin' I was niver in Nivelle before, may be 'tis a bit of blunder to say here we are *again*. Ah, niver mind, you're used to my blunders, or if you're not, you ought to be, and so I won't apologize. I wish you were here too, ye lazy blaguard! What d'ye all mane by skulking at home and lavin' the brave Sons of Erin to fight your battles? Sure we're all Irishmen here, specially some of us; there's our grand old Roman-nosed darlint of a Wellington; he's the boy for Galway! niver fear; he'll

break old Boney's bones for ye, whin he gets a fair fight with him ; and thin ye may sleep quiet in your beds again ; and go down to prosperity dacently and paceably without being sint there before your time.

Oh, "ye gintlemen of England that stay at home at ease," ye'll be as savage as bears with burnt tails when ye hear of the lashins of fighting we'll have out here ; and you, out-of-the-hunt intirely. Bah ! you're Saxons ! and that's the finest term of reproach I can hurl at ye. Well, well, don't be too down-hearted, you're not so bad as '*Les braves Belges*,' as they modestly call themselves. Sure their bravery is stupendous ! They're so full of it that it oozes out of their finger ends whinever it's wanted, and is quite as visible in their backs as in their breastplates; this is mighty convanient, because, whether they stand their ground or run away, their cour-

age is equally conspicuous both to their friends and foes, and I must do them the justice to admit that they are equally ready to show their faces to their friends and their backs to their inemies. It is a sacret, but I'll live and die in the belief that these ingenious heroes have their breastplates so artfully constructed that they can slip them round, and down, upon fitting occasion (or, as ye might say, upon misfitting occasion); and then, d'ye see, the inemies' bayonets help them over a stile or a hedge in an iligant fashion, without wounding anything but their dignity. I spake this from experience, me boy! Sure I've seen the thing done, divil doubt me; but, talking of the divil, I saw your dandy friend, Fallington, yesterday—not that I mane to insinuate that this point-device young gentleman is any relation of the other 'gentleman-in-black'—may be I'd like him

better if he was; ah, but he's not a bad fellow at all (I mane Fallington, not the divil); he's as proud of his fine feathers as a paycock, but he niver shows a white one, and I wouldn't wonder, if in his cool, dandified fashion, he'll fight like a bantam.

"*A propos* of birds, we've got old Colonel Falconer in our division. By St. Patrick! he's the quarest old cock that ever crowed at the head of a regiment! But there, I'm forgettin', sure his name don't mean a bird at all, but a bird-snarer; faix I wouldn't give much for the bird, afther he snared it, at laste if he happened to be in one of his tantrums. I don't think he'd lave many feathers on it to boast of. Ye may remimber, I'm just a little hot myself, if anybody 'threads on the tails of my coat;' but, tare-an-ouns, I'm an angel on horseback—a quiet, gentle, little sucking-dove to that grim old martinet.

Bah! how can he be a *martinet* if he's a Falconer?

"Botheration, I'm making another hash of my metaphors! Well, what are ye laughing at, ye spalpeen? for I know you'll be laughing at me just now! Did ye never hear of a hashed metaphor? Oh, 'tis a grand dish! Order it next time you dine at your club; with *sauce-piquante à la critique.* You'll enjoy it immensely (if ye didn't chance to make it yourself).

"Arrah! where was I before the last hash? Oh, I know, I was tellin' ye of that irrepressible old colonel. Well, sir, I give ye me word he's here, there, and everywhere all at once; in-and-out, and round-about, like a dog at a fair; he's simply the best imitation of Paddy Roche's bird that was ever breeched. Steady there! How could Paddy Roche's bird be breeched? More likely to moult,

eh? Oh, you're a witty dog, but I took the wind out of your sails there! I said it first! Well, I wonder Falconer don't moult, then, for he's always ruffling his feathers, or getting them ruffled by some one else. Sure the long spell of soldierin' that he's had makes him do his duty splendidly, but it has not robbed him of the Englishman's birthright of a grievance and a grumble. He's as brave as a lion, as true as a mastiff, as active as a terrier, but as irritable as a washerwoman without her tay!

"There, me boy, what do you think of that for a charrakter? Isn't it a beauty?

"So your old-young friend Pierce has come out to join his dad's regiment; now there's a fellow after my heart intirely! None of your cold-blooded, cold-creamed "haw-haw" bucks in buckram, who look as if they had swallowed a handspike and it had

disagreed with them; but ever ready with a bright smile, a gay word, and a warm hand-shake, alike for an old friend or a new acquaintance. Why, sir, would you believe it, he's only been here a week and has gained the hearts of all the men of his troop, and all his fellow-officers in the regiment. Colonel Falconer is as proud of him as a hen with one chick; even Fallington does not venture to patronize him, and by St. Patrick and St. George, both at once, I haven't felt the slightest inclination to quarrel with him! Sure an' I like to see him o' horseback, with a fine, elastic seat, a grip like a centaur and a hand like a lady. Whoo! and don't the ladies doat on him, too? The few and far-between that we get a chance of seeing on our short furloughs are almost as fond of him as they are of me. But I'm not a bit jealous, for I can see out of the tail of

my eye that Mr. Pierce doesn't care the twinkling of a bed-post for niver a one of 'em. He's been hit pretty hard elsewhere; (by the way, how is that pretty Miss Langdale that you fellows used to rave about?) and as cruel destiny has denied him the privilege of Irish birth, he has only got room in his heart for one girl at a time; poor divil! how dull it must be for him! Why he's as bad as married already!

"But, whirroo! what's astir outside? Hurrah! it's all right! Boney's coming, me boy! and we're going to mate him! sure that's the laste we can do in the way of civility. The fellows are cheering like mad at the sound of the drums, and here comes Pierce with Fallington and the old Colonel to tell me all about it; so God bless ye, ould boy, and don't say I nivir wrote you a long letther. May be I won't get your answer till I'm dead

and buried; but nivir fret about that, it'll do for an epitaph if you stick it on my tombstone."

The letter ended thus, as abruptly as it began, and without a signature, of course; he took it for granted that I should know it came from him, and having not infrequently suffered heavily from putting his name to a bill, he had acquired a very natural dislike to signing it to anything else. Indeed, it was a great wonder that he had remembered the necessity of addressing it at all; for 'twas by no means a rare thing for him to post a letter blank, and then call down Heaven's vengeance on the blundering postman for not delivering it.

A blush of surprise, with just a tinge of annoyance, passed over dear Caroline's face when her name was first mentioned; but when Pierce was praised so warmly by my

eccentric friend the glow became one of unmixed pleasure, and the eyes brightened, and the lips parted with a smile that seemed like sunshine on a rose. But as the letter told of the gathering for war—the colour fled, the sunshine passed away, and the eyes glistened with tears that would come, despite all effort to control them.

Pleading headache, from the heat of the garden, she vanished into a darkened room, and Lady Langdale and Mildred soon retired indoors also. Sir Geoffrey had some fruit, biscuits and wine brought out, and we sat under the tree discussing the chances of the war, and the possible consequences of invasion.

Ever present to our minds were the maddening insults and indignities to which the conquered people had been ruthlessly and mockingly subjected. Rapine, violation and

insult had arrived at the dignity of fine arts, and they were only half-enjoyed by the conquerors unless perpetrated with a cool cynicism and a scoffing cruelty that would have done credit to Belial himself. God knows what we should have done if the storm had, indeed, broken upon us; but I think there was scarce one Englishman in those days who had not mentally resolved to sell his life as dearly as he could, rather than be a fettered witness to the dishonour of his own home.

Aye, and if the fearful crash of war should ever fall upon our land, and the tramp of hostile armies be heard in our cities, God grant that Englishmen will ever have that spirit of resistance and defiance to the death! War to the knife! Man the housetops, loophole the walls, pile the barricades, fight like Britons, careless of all odds;

and when all's done that bravery can do—Burn! burn! burn! smoke out the rascal-hornets as they did at Moscow, and let them perish with us!

"But," said Dr. Maxwell, "do you not foresee that terms will be made with the enemy before it comes to street fighting? Diplomacy will put on a sad and serious face, rub its hands as if washing them with 'invisible soap on imperceptible water,' take snuff with a melancholy abstraction of mind, and, finally, under strong protest, sign a document that will hand us all over, bound hand and foot to the Emperor."

"Besides," said Sir Geoffrey, "the curse of modern war is, that neither national nor personal bravery avails against organisation and discipline. It is simply a vast and hideous game of chess in which any number of pawns are ruthlessly sacrificed to give

check-mate to a king. Warned by Moscow, and knowing the dogged courage of the English, Napoleon would not be likely to put his head in the lion's mouth by hurling his soldiers into London; more probably he would draw a cordon of bayonets and cannon round it, so as to cut off all supplies, and then coolly offer the inhabitants the alternative of rapid starvation or abject submission."

"But could we not make incessant sorties, and break his line?"

"Barely possible. Against veterans and cannon, undisciplined valour would but rush upon destruction. No; it would be fatal to be cooped up in such a city as London, whose very numbers add to its weakness. We must not wait to be bearded in our dens, but go forth to meet our foe on the coast: every

mile that our invader marches inland strengthens him and weakens us."

"But have we anything like an adequate number of trained soldiers to meet him in the open field?"

"Certainly not; and without wholly changing all her traditions and bartering her freedom for military power, England never could maintain armies equal to those of France; but my view would be to use the strength and energy of our men in throwing up earth-works and forming entrenchments. Militia and volunteers would fight splendidly on the defensive, and with reasonable protection; especially when they had the whole country at their backs."

"True; from which to draw unlimited supplies, and recruit their ranks."

"The wealth of our country is simply enormous, and gold would be lavished like

water in this last death-grapple. The dauntless courage of our island mastiffs has been proven in a hundred battles, and the whole manhood and hardihood of Britain would come to the front with that quiet, steady, bull-dog tenacity which holds its own against the world in arms. From Land's End to John O' Groats, from farthest east to farthest west, every town would ring with the call, 'to arms!' every village green would have its muster-roll. To arms! By heaven! I long to hear the cry, and see the gallant rising! Such a *levée-en-masse* as the world has never yet beheld! From our mines, our fields, our factories, would come our sturdy infantry; fellows with iron thews and sinews inured to every hardship. From cricket-fields and rowing-clubs would come their natural officers; highly trained athletes, with pride of birth

and race to intensify their courage, rejoicing in the chance of playing a match in the grand stern game of war. Even our old Companies would gather again their craftsmen, and arm their 'prentices; whilst from each hunting centre in all the shires would ride out, splendidly mounted, gallant noblemen and gentlemen in their hundreds to hunt a nobler quarry than fox or stag."

"Yes, my dear Gilbert," said Sir Geoffrey. "There's a splendid 'power' in our country, but it is, unfortunately, only a wild power, which would be immensely difficult, if not impossible, to handle. If we had only had the common prudence of the middle ages, and made it compulsory for every grown man to acquire as much skill now with the musket as then with the bow, this alone, under favouring circumstances, might have given us a second

Agincourt. But why should not every schoolboy in the kingdom be trained to military exercises and combined evolutions ?"

"Why not, indeed; an hour less study would improve health and physique, and an hour of organised training in lieu of the spiritless monotonous daily walk would be far better for both bodies and minds. Any exercise that has a definite object is worth ten times that of mere exercise; the one exhilarates, the other only fatigues."

"Besides, to use the arms as well as the legs is obviously a double advantage; boys, say between fourteen and eighteen, are at the receptive age for such things, and would not resent or dislike drill so much as grown men."

"On the contrary. I believe they would soon take great pride and pleasure in it, and each school would strive to outvie the others; or a wider *esprit de corps* might be created

by massing the smaller schools in each town into companies and regiments, and presenting colours to each of these last when it had arrived at a certain point of efficiency; whilst occasional inspections and special trophies, offered as the reward of special excellence, would still further stimulate the generous rivalry."

"Do you not fear that so much encouragement would give too strong a taste for soldiering?"

"I think it would be a good thing for England if it *had* somewhat more of a taste for soldiering than it has. 'Tis a vast and widely-scattered Empire, and I would rather trust its defence to our own countrymen than to foreigners. Were it not for the terrible strain on the industrial and productive powers of the nation, I would have every healthy, well-grown young fellow passed through the

ranks for a year or two at least; but resigning that as somewhat impracticable, I conceive the next best, or, perhaps, the absolute best thing is to train them whilst boys."

"Would they not forget their training in manhood?"

"Never wholly; four years would fairly implant such a habit of combined action and implicit obedience, that they would always be ready for a *levée-en-masse*; and a few weeks with the colours, or in camp, would fit them for the field."

"I foresee another advantage in what you propose, if rewards were given for special personal aptitude—if, for example, any lad showing decided military talent or genius were to have a career opened for him by the presentation of a commission, on the same principle as scholarships are now awarded?"

"Most assuredly, and we should then have

the pick of the whole of the educated classes, instead of (as now) a few and far-between military colleges."

"Those who showed decided talent should, of course, be drafted on to the military colleges, *en route* for the army. But there is yet another recommendation to the scheme we are discussing, in the fact that the *educated classes alone*, would thus be trained to arms; and in these revolutionary times this is a consideration of some value, because these classes would obviously be vitally interested in the maintenance of law, order and stability, and hence would form a barrier equally strong against mob insurrection and foreign invasion."

"Shall we ever realise this Utopia of assured safety?"

"Never; we prefer a Paradise of Fools, varied by periodical panics."

A propos of Paradise, the ladies re-appeared in the garden, and we went for a quiet stroll through the hay fields towards the river. In the course of this walk, Caroline told me that Mrs. Helmore, of the Priory, had taken a great liking to all of them, but especially to Gilbert; also that Mary Grahame, who had recently been left an orphan, was a distant relative of the old lady and had come to stay with her. "Furthermore," said Miss Caroline, with a demure but yet mischievous look in her eyes, I don't think Gilbert was less attentive to Mrs. Helmore after this young lady's arrival."

"Was that so very remarkable, Miss Langdale, that you immediately wrote it down on the tablets of your memory as a new and extraordinary fact?"

"No, sir, it was not so very remarkable;

it is a weakness of your sex, I believe, to prefer a pretty young girl to the most charming of old women."

"It is a weakness that I am proud to share with my sex in general, and with Gilbert in particular."

"I don't think Gilbert would particularly wish you to share the weakness with him in this case."

"Indeed, is it so very confirmed a 'case,' then, with the young people?"

"On Gilbert's side the symptoms are very suspicious; he has been caught sighing, several times lately, and our little maid brought me a sheet of note paper, which she had found in sweeping out his room, on which was written an acrostic to Mary in Gilbert's wildest handwriting."

"Poor fellow."

"Well, yes, I'm afraid we must say 'poor fellow,' because Mrs. Helmore has hinted that Mary Grahame is already engaged."

"How old is Gilbert?"

"Twenty-five."

"Ha! a bad case; a man at twenty-two or three doesn't take much harm from a love-stroke; he enacts, for a few weeks, the part of a Blighted Being with more or less dismallity, according to his temperament; he then passes through a short phase of intense cynicism, from which he finally emerges a considerably more sensible and pleasant companion than before; indeed, I think a disappointment in love, aye, and a pretty severe one, too, is requisite to put the finishing touch to a young man's education; the self-contained, self-absorbed young prig, who boasts of his callousness to the charms of 'sweet seventeen,' is simply an imperfect

specimen of the genus *homo*, with a sense short."

"He makes up for his shortness of sense by an infinite length of nonsense. Having no sympathy with anybody or anything outside his own wretched little orbit he can do nothing but spin round upon his one peg like a humming top in a dress coat."

"Yes, and when the top or the topic is a musical one, and hums nothing but one tune, it is, perhaps, the greatest bore of the whole genus."

"Talking of bores, have you heard any of those dreadful little Infant Prodigies who are occasionally forced into an unwholesome precocity, and brought, with their big heads and preternaturally long fingers into a glaring concert-room, long after the hour when they should be fast asleep? Have you not felt, notwithstanding the marvellous memory, and

agility, and perfect execution, that there is no answering vibration in yourself to their music?"

"Not the slightest. Everybody tells everybody else that it is wonderful! surprising! extraordinary! astonishing!! and then, with a scarcely-stifled yawn, everybody thanks goodness (in secret) that it's over."

"How is it that people will so peristently go to see and listen to such things when they have not any real enjoyment in them?"

"Simply because the prodigies are talked about; and anything that is talked about must be seen and heard. What should we think of our partners at a dance if they knew nothing whatever of the common topics of the day?"

"Well, yes, it is through these common topics that one passes on to things better worth talking about; but confess now, Miss

Langdale, you do not think much of a cavalier who can talk of nothing else."

"No; I should give him one dance to relieve his poor little mind of its small stock of small talk, and another (if he danced very well indeed) for the sake of the dancing pure and simple, but no more on that evening, thank you."

"Am I not right in my supposition that the manner of the man most pleasing to women is neither the fussy and effusive deference of the Grandisonian school, nor the gruff, monosyllabic rudeness of the modern type, but an unobtrusive and yet unfailing courtesy, which treats her as a rational fellow-creature in matters of intellect and imagination, but as of purer tastes and more delicate sensibilities in matters of feeling; a being before whom nothing coarse or vulgar should be said; nothing harsh, hideous or cruel be shown; a

being, therefore, whose influence refines our coarser natures, and moderates our instinctive inhumanity?"

"I am afraid we do not always come up to your ideal of us; we are a little apt to encourage and even join in your 'inhumanities,' rather than moderate them; but with regard to the manner that pleases us best, I believe you will find that we all prefer sincerity. Still, there are a great many kinds of sincerity; the sincerity of a perfect gentleman makes him 'gentle' and unostentatiously deferential; and, naturally, we like that kind of sincerity best; the sincerity of a rough and rude-natured man is rough and rude, yet perhaps it is better he should still be sincere, for, if he attempts the manner of a gentleman without being one, he is apt to look like a clown in a Court suit. Manner is the dress of the mind, and not its disguise; and the

attempt to dress a coarse or common mind in a 'fine manner' is soon found out and despised."

"In this view, you would reverse the old proverb, and instead of saying, 'manners make the man,' you maintain that it is the man that makes the manner."

"Yes, first make yourself a gentleman in the high and noble sense of the term, and you need not trouble yourselves with codes of politeness or 'Hints on Etiquette.'"

"And, yet, in so artificial a society as ours these codes and hints are not without their use. The most noble-natured man, when suddenly drawn into a higher circle than his own, may subject himself to much cat-like criticism and shallow sneering by the omission of some trivial observance which constitutes one of the Shibboleths of the set."

"So much the worse for the cat-critics and

shallow sneerers; they are generally the wall-flowers of society, and, as everybody knows that they are, by nature, spiteful, no one pays much heed to their spite."

"True nobility of all kinds has a species of unconscious kinship, and those who are noble by birth and station are generally the first to recognize nobility of nature, and to dispense with the set Shibboleth."

"'One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin!'"

"Yes, Shakspeare explains in a line what I have been trying to say in many words."

By this time we had reached the river, and by this hour of a Sunday evening a motley scene it presented! There were very many little Britons in the ancient and classic costume of nothing-at-all, disporting themselves in picturesque attitudes on the banks, or in the sedgy waters of the creeks; shrilling to one another in the high discordant tones

peculiar to Shoreditch and Whitechapel. There were their elder brothers of seventeen or twenty, gaudily apparelled in bright blue, or still more brilliant red ties, rowing somewhat vaguely about in small skiffs of the period; sometimes in gloomy and sardonic solitude, sometimes in the gay and *debonnaire* companionship of a young woman, also attired in decided colours. There was industrious, painstaking, bald-headed *pater familias*—drawing "lots" with one weakly pair of sculls, whilst the mother, or an idolized first-born, steered. Poor patient drudge! how he laboured to keep in mid-stream! and how invariably he found himself in shoal-water; first on one bank, and then on another. There were Izaak Waltons by the dozen; sitting with meek, subdued expectancy, bobbling their lines and floats into the turbid, sluggish water, hoping against hope for the magnificent prize of a gudgeon, or a

minnow. Dear, sanguine old gentlemen! they might with equal chance of "sport" have dipped their hooks and baits into a kettle wherein a turbot was being boiled, or cast their lines from a "three-pair-back" into an adjacent water-butt. But, with true British pluck and perseverance, there they sat (the fine old boys) at dewy eve, having, since dewy morn, caught nothing but a cramp; well, 'twas, at least, a harmless sport—if it pleased them, it didn't hurt the fish—and, meantime, evidenced a patience and a trust worthy of a better cause.

We stood on the bridge for awhile, watching, with a quiet amusement, this mild little drama, wherein the actors were playing their unconscious parts, and taking their pleasures sadly;—and then turned homeward. At Caroline's suggestion we varied our return-walk by going through Mrs. Helmore's grounds; entering by one of the lodges, from

which emerged a neatly-dressed, middle-aged woman in a trim white cap, with a pretty face under it. She dropped Caroline a curtsey, accompanied by a very pleasant smile, as we passed through the gate. The grounds were a picture of neatness; the broad road was as smooth as rolling could make it; not a stone dared to be out of its place; not a weed ventured to show itself on pain of instant death. The lawns looked as if they had been combed and brushed as well as mown; indeed, a vivid imagination might have supposed them to have been pomatumed also, whilst the shrubs had over night the air of smug, well-to-do citizens in their best and shiniest Sunday coats. The greenhouses and vineries were of spotless white paint and dazzling clean glass, and the Priory itself was like a house of snow, with diamond windows. But the genius of Cleanth (if I may coin a word to suit the place) had set up his highest altar on

the stone steps. These were simply dreadful in their virgin whiteness, and I shuddered to think how one could possibly dare to put a foot upon them on a dirty day.

We were passing away from the house, when the sound of wheels announced Mrs. Helmore's chariot, which came slowly rolling round a bold curve of the park road, and sailed steadily up to us, drawn by as grand a pair of glossy "bays" as any in Hyde Park in the mid-season; one being ridden by a grave and gray old postilion, perfectly appointed in a richly ornamented huntsman-like cap, a scarlet short jacket, with gold lace, white buckskins and immaculate tops. The chariot was large and well-hung on C springs, pale-amber in colour, with a magnificent coat of arms emblazoned on the mirror-like panels. The old lady, who sat majestically inside this superb equipage, looked in every way suited to it; having

large handsome features of a decidedly aristocratic type, and the attitude and air of a Duchess. Her gesture, as she greeted Caroline, was by no means devoid of grace, and her smile unmistakably sweet and kind. But, helas! these outward graces made the shock all the more terrible to those who heard her speech for the first time; for, horrible to relate, this grand and stately lady, whose outward appearance made it seem quite consistent that she should be gorgeously apparelled in velvets, and satins, and ermines, and who would otherwise have been quite a splendid specimen of superb 'womanity,' evidenced a weakness for misplacing "poor letter h;" an ungovernable tendency to add unnecessary g's to the ends of her words, and to ring out redundant r's; furthermore, her rendering of the 'u' in such words as "butcher," was, to say the least of it, unusual, and of the 'i' in oblige was—well,

"old-fashioned." However, this last conversion of one i into two ee's has since had the sanction and example of my Lord John Russell, so probably if my Lord John Russell had been 'invented' at that time, "society" would have been less shocked at this last-named peculiarity.

As we passed on, Caroline kindly warned me beforehand of this matter, and explained that at the first call her mother had been simply withered with these evidences of want of culture, whilst she and Mildred had had the utmost difficulty in keeping a becoming gravity, especially as the old lady, in her desire to make herself agreeable, had been unusually animated and chatty, and capped the climax by informing them, relative to her present estate, that her deceased husband had been "Lord of the May-nure." This, with its instant suggestion of the contents of a farm-yard, was almost too much for them

all; but they behaved splendidly, and in due time were amply rewarded for their self-command. Lady Langdale had determined that it was absolutely impossible to accept the proffered intimacy under such trying circumstances, but Mrs. William Langdale, coming down to the Cottage to stay a few days, insisted upon calling at the Priory; and with her more acute knowledge of the world, and the various habitants thereof, she saw through these blemishes of speech down into the depths of as good a heart and noble a nature as ever dwelt, or deserved to dwell, on earth. There were two or three reasons why Mrs. Langdale was clearer-sighted than the others in this matter; first having been told, and probably with a little womanly exaggeration, of the nice "derangement of epitaphs," and the curious haziness as to the correct use of vowels and consonants, these peculiarities did not come upon her with that bewildering

surprise which had made Lady Langdale feel as if a cold shower-bath of g's, and r's had suddenly fallen on her head. Another reason was her far wider and more varied experience of many classes of society; and yet another, was the kindly desire that her nieces should not lose the advantage of a wealthy and genial neighbour, simply from attaching a too exaggerated importance to superficial defects. Had Mrs. Helmore been a vulgar-*minded* woman, no one would have been keener to detect this, nor stronger in her dislike, of it; but this—she saw at once—was not the case, and hence she fairly rallied and laughed Lady Langdale out of her determination to drop the acquaintance, and not only so, but took some pains to enrol Mrs. Helmore on her own visiting list.

Hence the acquaintance had grown to a very pleasant intimacy, and many agreeable reciprocities passed between the Priory and

the Cottage. Hot-house grapes and lavish baskets of fruit and game, in their due seasons, were amply repaid, in Mrs. Helmore's estimation, by the winter evenings which the girls devoted to her amusement by reading or playing to her; or to whist, backgammon or cribbage to while away her otherwise lonely hours. Besides which they had the pleasure of being able to return her kindnesses by contributing to her portfolios dainty little sketches, or to her boudoir some of the thousand and one little mysteries of the needle so dear to the womanly heart, and so pleasant to girlish fingers; but what she esteemed highest of all was the growth of love for herself, which these two dear girlies, quite naturally and sincerely, evidenced.

She had not "taken to" Gilbert at first, nor he to her; he was longer in getting over the first shock of the shower-bath than either his sisters or his mother, and would wickedly

imitate and exaggerate some of her most marked mistakes; but the girls gradually revealed to him the traits of noble nature, underlying the surface, and exorcised the mocking spirit. Thence followed, on his part also, a rapidly developed respect and regard for the intrinsic worth which speedily outweighed the extrinsic defects. She met him, more than half way, with a grand-motherly affection, which prompted her to cast about far and wide for some means of aiding his career.

Just at this time her relatives, the Grahames, whom of late years she had almost wholly supported without letting them know it, had, at last, worried one another into another world, and both dying within a week; neither had even the satisfaction of a temporary respite from the worry in this. This left Mary to the tender mercy of their unknown benefactress; a tender mercy that

had never failed when called upon, and which, assuredly, did not fail in the case of the poor orphan girl. Hence Mary Grahame was speedily installed at the Priory, and hence Mr. Gilbert's more frequent visits to—"Mrs. Helmore?"

* * * * *

The storm had gathered; had burst; had passed away; and England was saved!

In the fresh triumph of that glorious victory how few thought upon what a slender thread the future destinies of this country—aye, and of the whole of Europe had hung! But for the clear, cool head of that grand Iron Duke and the quiet, unboasting courage of his splendidly-trained veterans, Attila de Boots would have put his heel upon our necks with a vengeance, and London would have been made painfully aware of the truth of Blucher's observation of "*Mein Gott!* what

a place for a sack!" But as it was, men breathed freely once more, and went about their various affairs with lightened hearts and cheerful spirits. Hand-shaking, dining, supping and dancing became the order of the day. Mrs. Helmore set a good example in her neighbourhood by calling into solemn council the ladies of the Cottage, and Mrs. William Langdale, and with their aid planning such a ball as the old Priory had never witnessed, even in its gayest days. Now, when it is remembered that to this gathering, Pierce and Fallington were to come—to meet Caroline and Mildred—and Gilbert to meet Mary Grahame, I think it will be conceded by most of my young friends that, at all events, there was the probability of a pleasant evening for "some people," whatever suffering might be entailed on fathers, mothers, chaperones and wall-flowers.

O'Sullivan was there, too, in all his glory, with his arm in a sling, but his heart as full of fun and nonsense as ever; declaring, that whilst his comrades had to content themselves with the smile of one fair lady apiece, he was sure of half-a-dozen at the very least.

Mrs. William Langdale had, from the outset, taken the chief management of the affair into her own hands; and that is equivalent to saying that it was admirably carried out.

When the evening came, Mrs. Helmore, after graciously receiving her guests, was comfortably relegated to the card-room with some congenial "old partner," skilfully chosen and paired off, to play whist for the live-long night and a considerable part of the next morning. William Langdale was "told off" by his wife for this duty, with strict instructions to keep the old lady well amused; Dr. Maxwell and Sir George Blandville being

the other two, relieved occasionally by Mrs. Helmore's favourite physician, and pet parson. She would have been a very exacting woman, indeed, if, with such a well-selected group of ancient beaux to attend upon her, she had not passed the hours brightly, especially as one or the other of her "dear girls" came in to have a little talk with her after most of the dances. It was not very scientific whist that was played that evening, for William Langdale executed his mission to perfection, and, in between each rubber, generally managed to set the table in a roar; and when, in due course, he handed the lady of the house down to the magnificent supper in the dining-room, and sat upon her right hand, he was completely in his element. His stories would be considered a shade "broad" in these days, but then, folks were not quite so easily shocked as we are, and forgave a

good deal of breadth, if it was not too long also. But he was greatest at speaking, which was then much in fashion at all social meetings, and the humorous skill with which he could assume the mock heroic or the mock pathetic, the turgid or the bombastic tones of the sham orators of the table, or mimic the bogglers, the bashful, the stutterers, and the conceited, was a treat to hear; whilst from beneath all this there came up, at times, an undertone fresh and clear from the kindly generous nature, and the feeling heart, which redeemed it from the imputation of mere "excellent fooling." He had, in some degree, the gift that distinguished Theodore Hook, and could improvise amusing doggrel upon the names of the guests at table. On this occasion he had the audacity to begin with that of his hostess, and gave the following comprehensive toasts, in a rich Hibernian

brogue, out of compliment, as he said, to the great and gallant "O' Sullivan" :—

"Here's the Lady of the Priory,
She is sometimes rather fiery,
Like Vesuvius, with its lava, down below,
But you needn't take alarm,
For although her heart is warm,
'Tis kept cool by her sweet temper, soft as snow.

"Then here's to Dr. Maxwell,
Sure you're patience he will taxwell,
When to mend your lives and habits he will urge ye;
But when'er ye go to hear him,
You will love him and revere him,
For he'll give you the full benefit of Clergy.

"Then here's my old friend Blandville,
From his mansion in the Grand Ville,
Full of every kind of science, and Greek ology,
He's so very, very clever,
That I never, never, never
Dare to drink his health without a meek apology.

"Here's to all the pretty girls
With their dimples, smiles, and curls,
And their eyes that pierce our hearts like burning glasses
(Though my wife will box my ears),
'Bless you all my little dears!'
Here's a health, my gallant friends, to 'all good lasses.'

"Ah! indeed, then, Mr. Pierce,
Sure you needn't look so fierce,
I'll admit, Sir, that your lady-love's divine,
No—I swear I didn't wink,
And to prove it let us drink,
A bumper to my darling Caroline!"

This was really too terrible for poor Caroline, to have the eyes of a hundred people drawn to her, especially as, by a singular accident, she happened to be sitting next to Pierce at supper. If she could have got at her mischievous uncle at that special moment she would have aided his wife womanfully in the "boxing of the ears," whereof he pretended to be in dread, and might even have been tempted to pull his hair. Pierce, in the midst of his annoyance, was consoled by a thrill of pleasure at having his name so pointedly coupled with Caroline's; this was, however, accompanied by a thrill of pain also from a merciless dig in the ribs, administered by O'Sullivan, who was unhappily near enough to get at him, but as, at this moment, the signal for returning to the ball-room was given by Mrs. Langdale, to cover her niece's embarrassment, annoyances of all kinds were quickly whirled away by bright music

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and the brighter dance; in the intervals of which old vows were re-vowed, and the dear old story, that is never old to those who tell and those who hear it, was repeated and listened to.

Meantime, Mildred was discovering that war, with all its terrible consequences had yet some little use in the world by its action upon character. Mr. Fallington had been wounded in the campaign preceding Waterloo, and although it did not involve either great anguish or a long protracted recovery, it was enough to make him aware, as he lay on the field of battle, and afterwards in a lonely tent, with only a rough soldier for his nurse, that human life is held in a very delicate balance, which an ounce of dull lead or an inch of cold steel will quite suffice to turn. In the feverish watches of the night strange old voices seemed to return upon him, such as he faintly remembered hearing speak

in the tones of his loved mother, before the sports of Eton and the dissipations of Oxford had drowned all other sounds.

In the silence and solitude of the sick-couch these made themselves once more audible, telling again the grand old-world legends of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Heroes with their simple, but magnificent obedience to God, and their undimmed visions of a higher law than that of earth, and a nobler purpose than that of pleasure. The ideas that these recurring memories brought with them were at first vague and nebulous, and accompanied by a half-childish awe and terror, but they slowly became clearer and calmer as the pictures of the past, still unrolling before him, came down the ages to the ineffaceable scene on Calvary. Then, for the first time in a life of shows and shallowness, the vision of that dreadful, but yet glorious sacrifice aroused within him the faint

glimmer of the meaning of "life." Emotions of shame, wonder and gratitude were gradually aroused; possibilities of a higher future began to assume shape and distinctness; and a mighty wind of resolution set in, bringing with it a bracing refreshment to his soul.

Death is, indeed, a mighty teacher! The mere approach of his shadow, by darkening the high lights and glare of life, enables us to see things as they are, rather than as they seem. Aye, even this shadow seemed to make Fallington aware that all the Past, with its full muster-roll of heroes, lies close to us, just outside the battle-field of life. He felt that the cold, stern hand of the inevitable King of Terrors might at any moment tear open his tent and place him in the ranks of the countless hosts of the departed on their eternal march.

The lightest frivolity cannot laugh away such thoughts at such times, and Fallington

did not even attempt to do so. Some small germ of nobleness in his nature, heretofore smothered by the circumstances of his position, caused him rather to welcome and ponder upon these higher thoughts; and hence, when he resumed his military duties, he felt himself to be a better man, and by no means a worse soldier.

Whilst sitting out a dance with Mildred in the conservatory, he had, with almost boyish frankness and *naïveté*, told something of this matter to her, and asked her to help him to the utmost of her power to form and sustain the higher ideal at which he would now fain aim. In one other of his confidences, during that evening, he seemed eager to tell her that his brother's estates (always much embarrassed) were now, by a series of disasters, in such very "low water" that he himself would probably succeed to little more than the bare title. Mildred was unmistakeably pleased to note the

higher tone of character ; and laughingly accepted the post of Guide, Philosopher, and Friend which he had implored her to assume ; but when, with such very great circumstantiality he described to her his family affairs, she began to feel a little embarrassed, and wondered why he should tell her of such things.

Before the evening was over, however, the "why" was explained, for the last of his confidences carried with it the declaration of his passionate and faithful love for her. With an emotion and an eloquence which half-astonished and half-alarmed her, he urged his suit on every possible and impossible plea ; but Mildred put his pleading aside quietly and kindly, yet with a decision that seemed to take the sunshine out of his heart. Hard for Fallington, but quite right for Miss Mildred. The change of character was great ; but, as yet, untried, and it was impolitic of

the young fellow to be so very hasty and rash in his wooing. Yet none the less there came a flutter to Mildred's heart, a flush to the pale cheek, and a certain crystallizing brightness to her eyes, suggestive of a possible tear, that told her of a future-possible revocation of her stoical decision. Poor Fallington was too utterly miserable to see or foresee anything of these signs, and shortly afterwards took his departure ; not, however, without obtaining Mildred's promise still to meet him as a "friend."

Oh, Love ! what antic-tricks thou playest with young hearts ! Whilst this high comedy was being played out by these young people, two still younger were passing through the throes of *their* little melodrama. Gilbert and Mary Grahame had parted scarcely more than teasing boy and merry girl ; they met again, and time and sorrow had attuned their hearts so finely, that when Love's hands

touched the strings, a subtle harmony arose to which an undertone of discord lent an inexpressibly painful sadness. Yes, love's music for them now was in its tenderest minor key, and the strange commingling of pain and pleasure in the cup of life was very bitter-sweet. That he loved her, deeply, fervently, madly, he knew full well; and she? ah, who dare tell a maiden's secret? time alone must tell! All he knew was this, that she was to be Mrs. Helmore's heiress; that Mrs. Helmore purposed to marry her to some fellow whose very name was kept a secret, but with whom he yearned with a most hungry anger to cross swords in some quiet forest glade; that if Mary did not love this fellow, yet he (Gilbert) would be a sneaking, dishonourable scoundrel, to endeavour to ruin her by supplanting him, seeing that he had literally nothing but himself and his pen to offer her in exchange.

Hence the self-inflicted pain of seeing her; of often touching her hand and waist in the dance; of daring to look into her eyes, until, like the proverbial moth in the proverbial flame, he was shrivelled by the light, and, through all, keeping a forced gaiety on the surface, a cruel curb on his tongue, and an inward poignant sorrow on his heart. His love was of the old Bayard, chivalric type that worshipped, rather than loved; that placed his lady on the high shrine of imagination, and bent down in self-renunciation before her; idealizing her until a luminous glory seemed to make her, indeed, but a "little lower than the angels," and then feeling it to be almost a profanation to touch her hand, or to speak to her except in tones of tender, reverent homage. At those tones, and these evident marks of devotion, Mary's colour would sometimes come and go, and her eyes glisten, but Gilbert dared not

attribute these signs of emotion to anything more than recurring memories of her recent sorrows ; or at most to a passing pity for his hopeless passion; if by chance she might partially have divined it.

Not one word of it had he breathed to her; not one word would he utter; however strong the temptation, however lonely they might be; but perhaps he was conscious that Mary's eyes had pierced some little way into his secret. Now, curiously enough, this overwhelming devotion, this over-mastering passion did not make him a mere lovesick fool in society ; rather, indeed, it seemed to give a higher tension to his intellect, a clearer and more incisive tone of thought, and a keener power of observation. He rattled away gaily and wittily enough, with half-a-score of fair ladies in turn, through the length of that evening; ever ready for the sharp fencing of conversational "carte and

tierce," especially when Mary happened to be within ear-shot; because, although his gaiety stooped down to quiet tones when in *tête-à-tête*, he longed to win a bright smile from her, unawares. It was not difficult for him to induce his Aunt William Langdale to invite Mary Grahame to go with his sisters for the long planned visit to the Robinsonian paradise on the banks of the Thames, to which that lady was making her Hegira on the morrow.

And so the curtain comes down on the grand ball at the Priory, and rises again a week hence on the silvery sunlighted waters of the river.

CHAPTER II.

'TWAS morning once again, ever-dear delicious morning! with its fresh cool light upon shrub and tree, field and flower; with its softened tender sunshine wooing bashfully the rippling stream that smilingly reflected back the welcome rays. Morning, with its matin song of lark, its cheery hum of bees, its flashing fish, leaping boldly out of the water, unscared as yet by hook, or line, or float. Morning, with its perennial message of hope, banishing as by the magician's art, all the dread distortions, all the grim, bewildering drolleries, all the wild, unguided confusions of the Land of Dreams. Morning, with its health-bringing

breezes, laden with vigour to arouse men yet once again from the mimicry of death, and to lift their first thoughts of instinctive gratitude to the Gracious Giver and Renewer of Life.

"We know not what a day may bring forth." May not that be accepted as an augury of happiness, as well as a probability of woe?

To the suffering may it not bring relief? to the sorrowing may it not bring consolation? to the troubled may it not bring peace? Hope on, hope ever, for if hope be not fulfilled on earth, it is but deferred. All worthy, earnest, noble hopes shall have their consummation, soon or late. Trouble, pain and grief last but a few score years at most; Hope lives on for ever.

Very early morning, indeed, was the tryst at Blackfriars Bridge, whereunto came Sir Geoffrey, Carry, Mildred, and Mary Grahame,

meeting there Pierce, Fallington, O'Sullivan and Gilbert. Embarking in a capacious wherry they went up with a swinging tide to the old boat-house at Westminister, and transferred the ladies to their four-oared cutter. Sir Geoffrey took the tiller-ropes, and the gallant little crew gave-way with "a will" and soon sent their boat along into the mid-stream. Once there, they did not seem to see the "pull" of making a toil of a pleasure, and so with occasional spurts, they for the most part, paddled leisurely up to Richmond; often resting on their oars to take in the full pleasantness of the charming little pictures of English homes that enliven and adorn the banks of our dear old Father Thames. The shadows of the trees came out long and large across the smooth green lawns, or glassed themselves in the river. The blackbirds and thrushes were vying with each other as to which should be the earliest

bird for the earliest worm ; though occasionally an emancipated spaniel, joying greatly in its liberty, would disturb their repast, or a treacherous sly-boots of a puss would try to steal a march upon them whilst engaged in their search for a breakfast. As our pilgrims passed still up and up, the lower stratum of humanity began to upheave itself from the quietude of sleep, and in the guise of gardeners with their scythes, and bargees with their oars, give evidence that the world was gradually "getting up." Anon a conscientious groom might be descried in free-and-easy deshabille, indulging in a hasty but copious washing of his face and ears in a stable-pail ; then a yawning, and slightly untidy, housemaid would draw up a blind and open a window, and lean out in a *dégagé* attitude on the window-sill, probably experiencing a feeling of mild curiosity as to

where our pilgrims had come from, and where they could possibly be going so early in the morning. Soon after might be heard in the gardens the voices of merry children running and jumping about, with no very defined object except that of "running" and "jumping" for the fun of the thing.

By the time they had shot the arch of Richmond Bridge, giving-way with a vengeance, so as to come through with a flourish and had sent their cutter along at full speed for the last mile or so; they found their host and hostess both up and out in their delightful garden, ready to receive them with a hearty welcome. I had ridden down, partly because I should have been *detrop* in the boat, and partly from a preference for the saddle to any other kind of locomotion; and having arrived a few minutes before them, I watched with pleasure the four strong, handsome young fellows, bending to their

oars in fine time and at full strain, just to show how they could make their craft go along. Sir Geoffrey brought her round splendidly to the landing-place, and at the word "oars in," that manœuvre was executed like clock work. Old Jinks, the boatman, caught and held the prow with a grin of satisfaction on his face, partly in honest approval of how she had been managed, and partly in natural expectancy of a parting "tip." The oarsmen were not undressed to that approximate nudity which seems essential with rowing men of this day, but wore snow-white shirts, Byron collars, and thin black silk neckerchiefs, knotted sailor-fashion, round their throats; straw-hats, white "never-whisperums," and cricketing shoes. Strong and supple, and free as air they looked as they leapt ashore, and carefully handed out the three fair girls, and with many pleasant greetings and many quips and cranks, and

musical little laughs, we all sat down to a breakfast, which would have delighted the heart of a *blasé* epicure, but which to five hungry fellows like ourselves, was simply glorious. William Langdale was in great force. Like an Englishman, although everybody knew that he was as delighted as a schoolboy to see his brother, he only gave him a good hearty grip of the hand and a gruff, almost husky "Morning, Geoff.;" but his gladness showed itself in a perfect efflorescence of fun and nonsense and "all-round quizzing" of his blushing young lady-guests.

Capital fun; a perfect *abandon* of laughter at the time; but far too evanescent, and possibly too trivial to remain in the memory, or bear recording.

'Tis a pity that the sparkling jests and *jeux-de-mots* of bright, cheerful gatherings like these should pass away so quickly into the great dull limbo of Oblivion—that ruth-

less Oblivion that holds in its misty immensity all the "good things" that have flashed from mind to mind in social *parle* since the time of Amphytrion; aye, and since the old time before him also. If those who breakfasted, or dined, or supped with dear, genial Shakspeare had remembered and conveyed to others all the brilliant sayings to which, in his freest moods (and with the excitement of a social audience to enjoy them), he, beyond all question, gave utterance, 'twould have probably left for us as charming a treasure as his whole collected plays. *Mais que voulez vous?* the gold-capped magnum is opened; the wine comes sparkling forth, is tasted, drunk, enjoyed, warms the heart, flashes through the brain, and—is then—forgotten, and 'tis as great folly to mourn about past champagne as over spilt milk.

So, after our "past champagne," and, as

it chanced, also some "spilt milk," the mankind lounged about the grounds, whilst Mrs. Langdale initiated the girls into the whole construction of Paradise, from the dairies to the Belvedere on the roof. Not a nook nor cranny remained unexplored, and they all came forth again, smiling at the thoroughness of their investigation, and with their feminine curiosity most comfortably satisfied. *We* were only permitted, under strict female guidance, to explore the state-rooms, the bachelor's wing, and the wine cellars; only the bolder and more inquisitive spirits venturing a hasty glance into the kitchens, and then rapidly and instinctively retreated towards the stables.

Here William Langdale's large, sleek carriage-horses and my two thoroughbreds were figuratively in clover; here, too, we found the lengthy, sad-looking Jinks, whom William Langdale had already re-christened

"High" Jinks, sneering in an aggravating tone at the Cockney ignorances displayed by my dapper little pad-groom as to some matter of fishing.

Probably the little man had been vaunting his prowess with rod and line, and High-Jinks was incensed at the brag; but we only came in for the tail-end of the colloquy, High-Jinks just drawling out contemptuously—

"Yah! yer think yerself moighty clever, with yer spinnin' minnies and yer spinnin' 'Jennies,' too, for what I know; but, for cotchin' eels, as 'ud do yer heart good to see, give me a good long fat vurm! Whoy, a mate o' mine as 'as a punt (wich he lets out reasonable by the day or arf day), he's so fond of vurms that he most-in-general, when he's goin' a fishin' along o' gents, carries a good supply on 'em in one cheek; and the 'green uns' (them as 'ires his punt for the fust

time) they says, says they, 'Why, Jacob, wot a swelled face yer got this morning.' 'All right, sir!' ses Jacob, ses he, ''tain't anythink, only vurms for bait!'"

With this veracious anecdote, High-Jinks gave a portentous sniff of contempt, and shambled out of the coachyard to go and polish his boots. After we had enjoyed another saunter round the gardens—this time accompanied by the ladies—the word went forth to take to the water and pull up stream through the locks. O'Sullivan had, I fancy, found the three pair of lovers rather too much for him in coming, for he volunteered to take a pair of sculls, with High-Jinks, in the wherry which was to carry the two brothers, whilst Mrs. Langdale chaperoned the girls in the cutter, of which I, very considerately, took bow-oar.

We shipped, also, a rather perkety little "Buttons," who sat on an apology for a seat

at the extreme stern of the boat and pretended to steer, whereupon Miss Carry saucily whispered, "Youth at the helm and *Beauty* at the prow" (meaning *me*). His career was, however, quickly cut short; for, having put him ashore to wake up a drowsy lockman, he attempted to jump back into his place, and, of course, missed, and went splash into the water, to the serious detriment of the delicate muslins of our fair freight, and also to their temporary terror lest small Buttons should be drowned.

However, he was evidently reserved for another fate; the saturnine lockman slowly and grimly picked him out with a boat-hook adroitly inserted in his waistband, and holding him up to drain for a few seconds, landed him on the bank, where he stood shivering and whimpering, with all the perkiness thoroughly washed out of him. No one could quite suppress a laugh at the doleful

figure, and I'm ashamed to say that the "crew" did not try; Mrs. Langdale bade him run home across the fields and change his clothes, and we pursued the even tenor of our way up stream.

The day had turned sultry hot, and we pulled lazily; often resting on our oars for a lazy chat, especially when we could get under the shadow of a friendly tree, but still we had crept up and up with occasional spurts until we reached Sunbury.

By this time ominous black clouds seemed to gather themselves into dark, lurid masses, as if by magic, and came rapidly rolling up towards us from the west. Simultaneously, a rival host of heaven appeared more slowly approaching from the south-east. Meantime the noonday sun rode high overhead and glared down upon us with an almost deadly heat;—the two approaching cloud-armies seemed to darken and darken and to become

livid with fear and dull-red with rage, and then racing up at a thundering speed, the western host flung itself across the sun, and burst upon its eastern antagonist with a succession of incessant flashes and a deafening, bewildering roar of heaven's artillery. Down fell the rain, in streams rather than drops, and anon a mighty wind, rushing with a dull monotonous swirr, that formed an undertone to the crashing thunder, drove the falling rain before it into a sloping torrent, and lifted the hitherto calm surface of the river into a miniature sea.

The tall trees bent their stately heads lower and lower before the power of the blast, some losing only their dead wood and weakling branches; others, bending till they could bend no more, broke with a splintering crash.

'Twas a scene and a time when man feels his utter insignificance in presence of the

gigantesque powers of the elements; when a staunch, strong boat seems but a walnut-shell, and the stalwart oarsmen, merely half-drowned, struggling flies.

We had been debating as to the prudence of putting in to the next waterside hostel, and should probably have done so, but for Mrs. Langdale's desire to get back to meet her lunch party; but now all attempts to obtain shelter from the storm would have been simply absurd. The ladies had, at our instance, thrown our shaggy boating jackets over their shoulders, and huddled themselves closely together, but we were all wet to the skin in the twinkling of a bed-post; so we set our teeth hard and pulled like grim death against the furious head-wind, just to keep our boat's head straight. The river was now so rough that in the reaches we shipped a good deal more water than we liked, and this, added to the downpour from above,

water-logged our boat, and made it desperately dull pulling. I, as bow-oar, got the (water)-lion's share of this, and could not help a disagreeable suspicion, every now and then, that she was gradually going down by the head.

The ladies behaved splendidly; no screaming or moving about, as the cutter heeled over with the wind; and fortunate it was that they had this good presence of mind, for we were often within half-an-inch of the water, and a foolish jerk would have jerked the most of us into another world. Caroline had taken the tiller ropes, and on our upward voyage had had to bear a good deal of banter for steering us from one side of the river to the other and getting us into weedy shallows; but now, the fine line of her compressed lips showed that her whole soul was concentrated on her task, and, thanks to her girlish practice at Wolfern Chace, she kept

us as straight as an arrow on our downward course.

I should think Pierce (who was pulling stroke, and, therefore, immediately facing his young goddess) must have worshipped her more admiringly than ever on that day; for her classic statuesque beauty seemed sharpened and intensified by the sense of danger—pale as marble, each beautiful feature was as clearly defined as if the sculptor's chisel had just put the last artistic touch, and only when, with a rapid glance full of tenderness and trust at Pierce, the long eyelashes drooped for a second, could one realise that she was only a woman after all.

Poor little Mary Grahame sat cowering quietly close to Mildred; whose courage assumed, after the first shock, somewhat of a defiant and half-nonchalant air, whilst Mrs. Langdale was, of course, the first to break

the spell of silence which had fallen upon us by her cheery voice.

The main battle had now rolled away from immediately over our heads, and the flash and crash did not come so horribly close to us; but the rain still came down in torrents, the hot earth steamed, and a lurid, smoke-like mist still veiled the sky. Under these trying circumstances the locks were an abominable nuisance, especially as their rusty "wards" seemed very disinclined to open them. However, we got through these and all other difficulties in time, and at last landed in the Garden of Eden much bedraggled, but much more rejoicing, in good time to dress for luncheon. To dress? Yes! but how? "There was the rub," or, as William Langdale cruelly said, "there *was* the rub, indeed, which we might get with a rough towel, but after that—what?" Wet clothes are eminently

disagreeable and dangerous, and although we called the place Paradise, the costume which was *de rigeur* in Eden, was hardly admissible in the modern garden-party.

After enjoying our bewilderment, William Langdale played the part of our good angel by placing his capacious wardrobe at our disposal, and, with a malicious grin, the burly giant said he "hoped we should not find his clothes too tight."

Then ensued a scene of confusion in the portioning of the motley garments thus bestowed upon us, that it would take all the genius of an old clothes-man to describe. There was a checkered suit of grey, like that afterwards immortalised by Brougham; a snuff-coloured ditto; a blue coat with gold buttons, silk waistcoat, "buff never-whisperums" and gaiters; and a very sleek and shiny Court suit, that had only been worn once, on the memorable occasion when Mrs. Lang-

dale insisted on taking him to the Presentation. Perkins, by his master's command, had deftly shuffled all these garments into the most admirable muddle, and delivered parts of each into each of our chambers, hence the second lunch bell was ringing violently ere, with shouts of laughter, we had managed to readjust the disorder, and encase ourselves in the grotesque disguises.

Descending thus to the drawing-room, we found Kean and Liston; the only two out of all her expected guests, who had braved the elements. Kean entered into the fun of the thing instantly, and, throwing a searching glance at William Langdale and ourselves, burst forth in his stage voice—

"Methinks I see six Richmonds in the field."

"Only five, sir," said William Langdale. "I regret to see, Mr. Kean, that you lay your-

self under the suspicion of seeing double so early in the morning."

"Had him there," croaked Liston, "double, single, and the rub."

"I yield, I yield," said Kean. "But, oh, the vast renown thou hast acquired in conquering Richard, grieves him more, than doth the body parting from the soul."

"Richard's body need not have grieved at the parting, because his soul was sure to be a fried one."

"Aye,—that's a 'burning' commentary on his life."

"A still hotter one on his death; for he did not even take down with him any 'good intentions' to repair the pavement of the place that shall be nameless."

Whilst this short encounter of small wit was running its career, Mrs. William Langdale entered the room, and greeted her visitors with her accustomed easy grace;

then, apparently, another Mrs. William Langdale; only with the fair face of Caroline emergent from the dress; then another, with Mildred's bright smile and defiant air and yet another, in miniature, like Mary Grahame.

Happy accident for us; who else would have been most mercilessly quizzed by our fair friends; their baggage, which had been entrusted to the carrier, had not arrived, and they, also, were in like case with ourselves, and thus compelled to appear in their kind hostess's infinite variety of apparel. Of course, they carried off their disguises far more gracefully than we; indeed, such a pretty trio of half-defiant, half-demure, blushing young matrons it would have been difficult to find in all Richmond.

As for us, it was sufficient for any one to look at us, or for us to glance at each other, to produce peals of laughter. Our borrowed plumes fitted us so abominably that we might

each have passed for Prince Hal or Poins, masquerading in Falstaff's garments. Even saturnine, melancholic John Liston for once enjoyed a laugh himself, instead of being merely a cause of laughter in others; and Kean was delighted with the impromptu and unpremeditated fun of the whole affair. He took Mrs. Langdale into lunch, and contributed his full quota to the merry gathering. There was no ceremony as to places; we "stood not on the order of our going," but the young people instinctively paired-off according to their elective affinities, and by that sublime law of mutual attraction, which is as strong with bright eyes as bright crystals, O'Sullivan and myself were, metaphorically, left out in the cold; but we had some compensation because whilst the victims of mutual attraction were, in a great measure, unconscious of and inattentive to

the fund of anecdote which Kean and Liston drew upon, we enjoyed these heartily.

Kean led off with his adventures in provincial theatres, where the *dramatis personæ* had frequently to be improvised out of a very queer corps of actors. On one occasion, when playing "Richard the Third," the manager was at a loss for some one to come in as "Ratcliff" on the morning of the battle. Now "Ratcliff" has merely to say, "My lord, the early village cock hath twice done early salutation to the morn."

In his perplexity, he pitched upon a fastidious gentleman, who, having been engaged to play comic parts, considered his dignity wonderfully affronted at being called upon to appear in tragedy, and who, although not daring absolutely to refuse, was overheard by his brother actors muttering to himself, "Tragedy! demme! not used to this sort of

thing, demme! Never played tragedy! demme! my *forte* is comedy! Shan't play tragedy, demme!"

The upshot of this, was that on the night of the performance the offended comedian came forward with a smirk on his face then striking a comic attitude; and, winking at the gallery, he piped out in a mincing, affected tone—

"Me lud, there are two cocks in the village—ahem! demme!"

"What did you do, Mr. Kean?" asked Mrs. Langdale.

"Happily, my dear madam, a bright thought rescued me from the ridiculous perplexity which, for a moment, had dumbfounded me. You remember that I had just awakened from the terrible dream, where the ghosts of my victims rise up to bully me horribly. I therefore feigned to think Ratcliff another shadow, and, with a look of terror

and ferocity combined, I seized my *bâton*, which was lying on the couch, and hurled it at the pseudo Ratcliff with an 'Avaunt, thou shadow!' uttered in a tone of thunder. He 'avaunted' with an alacrity that betokened discretion rather than valour; and I then came forward with a startled gesture, taking up the part, 'By the Apostle Paul! shadows to-night have struck more terror to the soul of Richard, than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers, armed in proof, and led by shallow Richmond.'"

"But how did you manage the remainder of your part? because you have to take Ratcliff with you to play the 'eaves-dropper.'"

"Oh, I did very well without him, merely saying, 'Aye! I will go!' instead of 'Come! let us go!' and I'm inclined to think the effect was heightened by conveying the idea that the suspicious king was going on his espionage quite alone, rather than in any man's company."

"Why, yes, perhaps one always thinks of a spy in the singular number, rather than the plural."

"It would be singularly disagreeable to have them in the plural number; but will you care to hear of my escape from two other small dilemmas?"

"If you will care to tell; we shall be delighted."

"One was a very small and very natural mistake, made by another messenger in the same play, where he should come in and say, 'My lord, the Duke of Buckingham is taen,'* whereupon I make my great point of 'Off with his head!' So much for Buckingham!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Kean, but would it not be more consistent to say that you there make your great 'cut,' rather than your great point?"

"Meaning cutting off his head? Yes;

* In the acting Edition.

that's a very cutting observation, and very much to the point, though it rather spoils the point of my small story."

"A thousand pardons. I sit corrected; pray proceed."

"The messenger on this occasion came rushing in, and in his hurry exclaimed, 'My lord, the Duke of Buckingham is slain!' Awkward; very! It was no use to order them to cut off a dead man's head."

"No, you could not make a point of doing that, certainly; but what did you do?"

"Hissed through my teeth, with the concentrated spite of a thousand adders, 'Bury him, then.' So much for Buckingham."

"Capital!"

"No, 'twas a lame and impotent conclusion, and in another emergency I managed better (you see I'm letting you behind the scenes); for behind the scenes, when Macbeth goes off to murder Duncan, it is the duty of the

'property man' to provide a small quantity of a sanguineous fluid for Macbeth's hands. On the night of a first performance, the unlucky fellow had utterly forgotten this important accessory, and, when I rushed off, stood shivering and shaking before me, with his empty basin, stammering out a string of stupid excuses. Enraged and perplexed beyond all patience, I struck him a smart blow on his nose, and the rapid result of that manœuvre was amply sufficient for my purpose, so that I was enabled to return to the stage with the then doubly-appropriate words, 'I've done the deed! Did you not hear a noise?' The natural exclamation of pain, uttered by the unfortunate property-man, added immensely to the sensation, and 'brought down the house.'"

William Langdale and O'Sullivan laughed heartily at this story. Mrs. Langdale and Sir Geoffrey, and the men generally, could

not help laughing also, but it was with some degree of reservation. The girls evidently did not like it, and for a time, at all events, the great actor went down to zero in their estimation, Caroline saying very innocently to Pierce, "Do men really do such things as these to one another?" whereupon Mr. Pierce felt suddenly rather non-plussed for an answer, as an inconvenient recollection of a certain escapade of his own, within the walls of a theatre, flashed backed upon his memory.

It may here be remarked that Miss Caroline Langdale had become rather skilful in the somewhat Socratic art of putting innocent-seeming questions, some of which were exceedingly difficult to answer, with quite a child-like simplicity of tone and manner. With just a slight *soupçon* of a lisp and a smile, she would ask, "Is so-and-so really true?" or, "Do you really think this or that?" until, with the rash and the unwary,

she drew them on, by question after question, into a perfect quagmire of intellectual muddle; and then, like a veritable Will-o'-the-wisp, vanished with a light laugh, and left them to flounder out again as best they might.

To many these questions would often seem too childish but to those who read character more closely, they were very much the reverse; and I should not wonder if Mr. Pierce often longed for the time to come when he might stop those merciless lips in an old-fashioned, but very effectual, manner.

Mildred's commentary on the story was terse. She merely said, *sotto voce*, to Mr. Fallington, "Very cruel!" whereupon she brought upon herself the fair retort—

"Miss Mildred Langdale is a judge of cruelty and a proficient in the art."

The guide, philosopher and friend gave a haughty toss of her head, and sulked for five

minutes at being taken up so sharply; whilst Fallington looked miserable and crestfallen at his own unintentional sharpness and its result.

Mary Grahame said nothing, but glanced shyly at Gilbert, as if to see what he thought; and he, in reply to the mute question, said a little bitterly—

"'Tis not quite a story for ladies, but 'tis very true to Nature, and quite typical of human life, in its small way. We must all suffer for our mistakes, and there are blows far harder to bear than those of a fist."

Meantime, Mrs. Langdale was doing her best to draw out Liston, so as to give her first lion a rest, and time to eat his luncheon. Liston, in his slow, melancholy way, was quite as ready to do his share of the mild roaring as most of us are. In answer to her question as to whether he had seen his friend Theodore Hook lately, he replied with a sigh, and with

the corners of his mouth drawn down as if he were about to weep—

"No, no; Hook and I (eye) don't often come together now."

"Are we then to infer, Mr. Liston," said Sir Geoffrey, laughingly, "that you are both 'loose' characters?"

"On the contrary; I can't answer for myself, but Hook is decidedly 'fast;' as you may judge from what I will tell you. Listen: I was at Lady Blandville's ball last Tuesday, and late on in the evening I saw Hook pushing his way through the crush, with his usual coolness and dexterity, and making towards me.

"'Ah, John, how do, how do?' he said. 'Nice party, this seems—good rooms, too, eh? Wonderful fine woman, that, eh? But where are we, John? Whose house is it?'

"'Why? What?' I exclaimed, astounded; don't you know whose house you are in?

Oh, I suppose some one brought you without telling you?'

"'Not a bit, John. Nobody brought me—brought myself. One house just as good as another in this land of liberty and freedom; saw lights, heard music, had an hour or two to kill after dining at my club with some jolly fellows; too late for theatre—all right, ready dressed (like Ham went he went into the ark), came in here; 'here we are'; here we are again, John. But again, John, and yet again John, where are we?'

"'Why, you impudent scape-grace,' I replied, 'I've a good mind to tell Sir George, and have you ignominiously turned out. How dare you come to a gentleman's house without an invitation?'

"'Pooh! Pooh! don't flurry yourself, old man. Sir George's, is't? Which Sir George? There's such a lot of Sir George's now-a-days.'

"'Sir George Blandville's, sir,' I replied, severely.

"'All right, he'll do. Trot him up, and let me have a look at him; or, better still, introduce me to Lady Blandville. I'll bet you a dinner for a dozen that I'll take her down to supper.'

"'Done,' said I; and feeling sure I should win my bet, I introduced him, whereupon the witty rascal played his cards so well, that the lady laughingly accorded him the honour (as being, undoubtedly, the greatest stranger present), and he sat by her at the head of the table, and kept that table in such a roar, that he will be a welcome guest there henceforth. And I—have got to give a dinner to Hook and ten of his rollicking companions!"

Here Liston again drew down the corners of his mouth as if he were about to weep tears of penitence and misery, and we all laughed; and the more we laughed, the more

preternaturally solemn and owl-like he looked.

"By St. Patrick! that's a broth-of-a-boy, that Hook," said O'Sullivan. "He must be an Irishman, by his impudence; or if he isn't, he ought to be, and that's all the same, intirely. Who'll say now that English society is exclusive after this? Sure, whiniver I'm feeling dull, I'll follow his example, and spend my evening like a gentleman."

"Hm!" I demurred, "I wouldn't recommend *you* to try that little game; it wants great coolness, and you—are—well, just a little—'warm;' the chances are that, instead of taking your hostess down to supper, you would find yourself engaged in mortal combat with your host."

"So much the worse for him, sir."

"Granted, but none the better for you."

"Woorroo, wouldn't it me boy? Sure

fighting's next best to feasting; at laste when it comes first, like grace before meat."

"Unfortunately it is a grace to which is attached a good deal of disgrace in these degenerate days, and the man who attempts to fight his way through life with his fists, instead of being rewarded by a Queen of Beauty, is fined by a magistrate."

Whilst we were having out our little spar, Liston was waiting his opportunity for another roar, and now re-commenced—

"What I have just related is a fine specimen of one kind of impudence, but there is another and far more offensive form indulged in by great travellers. The week before last I was dining with Sir George, and you know he's very fond of notorieties at his table, especially what we may call 'geographical notorieties;' travelled monkeys, who have scuttled hither and thither into the out-o'-the-

way parts of the earth, chiefly with the laudable desire to come back and astonish the Browns', Joness', and Robinsons' who have stayed sensibly at home. Well, at this dinner there was a very big monkey indeed—almost a baboon—by the way, have you not noticed that inveterate travellers are often rather baboonish in appearance? This one had a decided likeness, and his chatter was nearly as guttural and incessant; and, probably, as veracious. At last he insulted our credulity with such an amazing 'cram' that I was moved in spirit to cap his climax. Watching my opportunity, whilst he was gobbling down a juicy peach, I struck in with—'I think you said you had never been in China, Captain Munchausen?' and before giving him time to reply, I went on to say—'Ah! the recollection of my captivity in that dreadful country will haunt me to my dying day!' This thoroughly aroused curiosity;

and a feminine chorus of 'Oh! do tell us, Mr. Liston!' gave me the 'lead' I desired. I therefore went on to narrate, with the most minute circumstantiality, the history of my shipwreck off the coast of China, and my seizure by the pirates; the debates they held as to murder or sale, their final barter of me, with a mandarin (in exchange for a sucking pig) and of the mandarin's cruel treatment. At this point I pretended to be overcome by my feelings, and wiped a tear from my manly eye. This intensified the sympathy, and stimulated the curiosity to its highest pitch, and even Munchausen himself was goaded to enquire what treatment I was subjected to? With many signs of reluctance and emotion, I proceeded to explain that the mandarin was a great breeder of poultry, but that all his hens having been suddenly cut off by an epidemic peculiar to that district, he caused their feathers to be

carefully plucked and dressed; he next ordered me to be stript of all my garments, except my shirt and trousers; these were then smeared with a strong liquid gum, and whilst this was still wet, the feathers were shaken over me until I was thickly coated with them."

"Terribly fowl play that," said William Langdale, in an audible whisper; but Liston proceeded without taking the smallest heed.

"In this condition I was carried very gently, so as not to ruffle my feathers, into a warm room in which a species of dwarf bedstead, raised a few inches from the floor, was placed; the parts of this bedstead corresponding to our 'laths' or 'sacking,' was formed of a stout open-meshed fishing net, stretched drum-tight; and upon this I was laid on my back, and commanded to lie still, on pain of instant death."

"Alas, poor bird, you were then, indeed, in the fowlers net," said William Langdale.

"Pretty dick!" murmured his wife.

Liston went on quite unmoved.

"A thick layer of feathers had been previously spread on the floor underneath my net, and upon this a number of choice eggs for hatching were scientifically arranged. By an ingenious adjustment of screws at the four corners, the net that supported my prostrate form was most cautiously lowered until I could just feel conscious of the eggs touching my feathery envelopement at a great number of places at once. A good meal of warm rice was then given me, washed down by a copious draught of raki, and the tortures of involuntary incubation commenced."

"I must say I don't think *henny* one could have (h)envied your position," said the incorrigible William Langdale.

"The raki, happily, gave me a strong tendency to sleep; and as they supplied me with plenty of this, and frequent meals of

warm rice, I was for the greater part of the time only half-conscious of my dreadful fate. I must do my captors the justice to say that they made things as pleasant to me as was possible under such very trying conditions. Three or four times a day I was carefully lifted off the net and allowed, for a few minutes, to stretch my legs, upon my solemn promise not to shake my feathers; and during the temporary absences from my multitudinous progeny (*in esse*), warm soft blankets were thrown over the eggs to keep them from being chilled. Oh! with what a thirst of body and soul I longed for a good 'wash!' In my half-delirious dreams I had taunting visions of delicious warm baths, sponging pans, tubs, douches, rivers, lakes, and seas; and, to add to my tantalization, a great broad shining river ran close by the place of my hideous confinement. One day, when I had been lifted off for my few minutes stretch, to

my excessive joy I heard the loud and unmistakeable sounds of my native tongue proceeding from a man o' war's boat as it came dashing up towards our landing place. The sudden hope of near deliverance nerved me with superhuman strength, and, striking out right and left at my pig-tailed custodians, I sent them spinning in all directions, like so many Chinese tops, and, taking to my heels, ran like a maniac down to the banks of the river, and plunged in with a terrific splash, just as the boat came up. One of the Marines fired at me, as I rose to the surface, doubtless taking me for some gigantic wild fowl of the country; but I managed to splutter out words enough to disabuse the others of that supposition, and, with shouts of irrepressible laughter, they lugged me into the boat, where I lay panting like a fish out of water. Doubtless, I must have looked a queer combination of fish, flesh, and fowl,

for, where the sailors had laid hold of me, the feathers had come off, leaving bare patches, like those of a hen whilst moulting; but I didn't care how they laughed; indeed, as soon as I got my breath, I joined them, and laughed more heartily than they did, with joy at my escape. To my further satisfaction, I heard, as soon as the officer in charge could suppress the men's fun, that his boat and four or five others, following close after, were on an expedition from the 'Thetis' frigate, sent up the river to make reprisals on the natives for some acts of piracy. But there wasn't much time for explanations, for John Chinaman was already blazing away at the boats with his queer old matchlocks, and the Marines were returning the compliment with 'Brown Bess' and good interest. However, the fire was not warm enough to please our fellows, so they landed, cutlass in hand, and dashed up the bank at the celestials with a

very decisive effect. A good many pig-tails were shortened in a very short time—and not infrequently the owners were a head shorter, also—'topped and tailed' both at once like old gooseberries; as a merry young middy pertinently (or impertinently) remarked. For myself was reserved a splendid revenge. I landed with the rest, and, singling out my mandarin, chevied him into the shed, and, catching him a blow between the shoulders, sent him sprawling on to the net with such force that he, being a very fat, large fellow, broke it through, and smashed all his beloved eggs. As a non-combatant, I did not feel justified in taking his life, but, as he lay very conveniently, I smacked him handsomely with the flat of my cutlass, until he roared and spluttered, with his mouth full of feathers and egg-stuff, in a most satisfactory and exhilirating manner. I explained to the chief officer of the expedition who he was,

and, seeing that he was a person of some importance, he was carried off as one of the hostages for good behaviour in future. This was fortunate for me, because on the return to the frigate, when we both had to make our appearance on the quarter-deck, he looked, if possible, the more ridiculous object of the two. The sailors had entered into the fun of the thing, and, before they took him to the boat, had rolled him to and fro amongst the eggs and feathers, until not only was he smothered in them over his body, but over his face as well, so that he looked more like an owl than a man."

"That was very natural," said William Langdale, "for you had made him (h)owl before."

"William!" said Mrs. Langdale, "you know I do not allow those hideously cockney puns; be quiet, sir, do! and let Mr. Liston finish his story."

"That is all, madam! It was quite enough for Captain Munchausen, who, when it was ended, said, 'H'm! remarkable adventure that;' but I had purposely filled in this ridiculous story with such minute details, and he had already told so many traveller's tales, almost as absurd, that he could not, or dared not, gainsay it."

The two great actors having thus contributed largely to the pleasure and amusement of our little world in Paradise, shortly after asked leave to have their post-chaise ordered, and hurried back to please and amuse the great world of London. The two brothers stayed awhile at table to chat about old times, and to discuss quietly a bottle from a vintage which had been laid down by their father when William was born; but we others sauntered out into the garden, and sat about on lounging chairs, enjoying the delicious freshness that had followed the morning's storm.

"What a penalty actors pay for their popularity," said Caroline. "Just think how terrible it would be to go rattling back from this sweet, fresh air into smoky London."

"Yes, and then to shut out the bright sunshine; and dress in exquisitely uncomfortable disguises, and prance about through a tragedy or a comedy for two or three hours to amuse a set of people of whom they know nothing."

"I can understand," said Mildred, "the pleasure of pleasing those whom we know and love; but not a motley assembly such as one sees at a theatre."

"You are right up to a certain point," said Gilbert, "there is no comparison between the high and exquisite pleasure of gratifying a refined and select few, and the coarse, omnivorous hunger for praise from the many. But the actor, happily for himself, achieves both; in every large audience he knows that

some few will enjoy his finest and sublimest interpretations almost as vividly as he does himself, whilst, besides this high-pitched intellectual sympathy, there comes the deep, bass undertone of popular applause from the heart, rather than from the head."

"The actor's career certainly has a swift reward; he sees, hears, feels and enjoys all at once the pleasures of success."

"An immense reward; shared also by the popular orator, the lecturer and the public reader. Is it not a little hard that the mere author is debarred by a frigid etiquette from any participation in this splendid stimulus to literary exertion?"

"Not debarred, Gilbert," said Sir Geoffery. "The modern poet can still emulate Homer, if he likes, and perambulate the world chanting his own poems."

"Yes, and with better pay than awaited poor Homer," said William Langdale.

"That is always supposing him to have the gift of a voice loud enough to fill a lecture-room; but I spoke only of the 'mere' author; the man who presumably could read his own writings better than any one else to an audience 'fit, but few,' but without the physical power to out-shout the coughs, and sneezings, and feet-shufflings of some hundreds of people."

"Ah, 'twould niver do, me boy, to let you clever fellows monopolise all the evenings with your 'pomes;' we poor divils would be out in the cold intirely, and should not get a word in edgeways."

"Allow me to say that words got in edgeways seldom have much point in them, and society would not be a great loser by their omission; but you must please understand that I would not desire to have a really bright conversation interrupted for the reading of the finest epic ever written. Where

wit meets wit in full career, and the fine light clash of thrust and parry, jest and repartee, strikes out the bright sparks of merry wisdom in their encounter, there is nothing in the whole range of social pleasure so inspiriting and delightful; and either the poet or the pianist who has the bad taste to interrupt such a feast of the gods, deserves to go without nectar and ambrosia for the remainder of his or her existence. But picture to yourself a quiet country house on a wet Sunday, where everything worth talking about has been said at breakfast, lunch and dinner; whilst in the intervals, the family and their guests have saturated themselves with books, magazines and papers of various degrees of goodyness. Well, after dinner, the men join the ladies in the drawing-room; engravings are turned over and languidly criticised; a little 'good music,' a little more indifferent singing is given; after a great deal more pressing than 'tis worth;

frequent gaps of silence occur, alternating with spasmodic attempts to be cheerful, and everybody gradually bores everybody else to the extreme point of yawning weariness. Now, it is at such times that an author of the meek and modest type (like myself) could come to the rescue and dispel the demon 'Ennui' manfully, by reading aloud and inviting criticism on some of his own productions; or, if that were too presumptuous, at least by interpreting to the non-writers some brother-poet, into whose meanings, by the great law of freemasonry in literature, he has penetrated deeply and lovingly."

"Then, why, Sir Poet, do you not at such times, go gallantly to the rescue and exorcise the demon of Ennui with bell, book and candle?" said Caroline.

"Because, my dear questioner, not one host or hostess in a thousand has the wit to

take advantage of such aid; they go on in the old stereotyped groove of 'Oh, *do* sing that wonderful sacred song of yours, Herr Crow,' or, 'Oh, *pray* let us have that touching *morceau* again, Miss Raven,' or, 'We are dying to hear that magnificent glee once more, Mr. Tom Tit, that you and the Miss Sparrows gave us this afternoon;' whereupon, *usque ad nauseam*, words and music are inflicted upon us that we have all heard a hundred times before, and, probably, by a hundred times better singers, and everybody is expected to go into mild ecstasies both at, and after the infliction."

"'Tis certainly a droll thing," said Sir Geoffrey, "that we English meekly endure such a monotony in our so-called 'amusements;' some of us, of course, are simply music-maniacs, and complacently listen to a certain combination of sounds, however often they are repeated; but a great many people,

purely as a mechanical custom and habit, implore their acquaintances to—bore them; but," addressing Gilbert, "if you feel this weariness so acutely, you should endeavour to break through the monotony."

"Rather a hard task to do in any case; but one which it is simply impossible to undertake unasked. One volunteer may be worth three pressed men in the army, but not in such a cause as this. It is admitted that the poet is, by nature, sensitive and reserved, and it is hardly to be expected that whilst Herr Crow and Mr. Sparrow are being implored, almost to the point of tearfulness, to make night hideous, he should, unsolicited, attempt to make a pleasant evening; besides, whilst society seems to prefer sound to sense, and stale sentiment to fresh utterances, he naturally refrains from interfering with their preferences."

"The preference does, I believe, widely

exist," said Mrs. Langdale, "but it arises chiefly from mental laziness; there are few things people resent so much as the being compelled to think; they will listen, with a charming satisfaction, to a vast deal of mellifluous rubbish, either in words or music, but no author or composer, who values his popularity, must venture to make them think."

"Well now let us venture to think of something else, my dear," said William Langdale. "You have let Gilbert have a nice little canter on his favourite hobby, and I'm afraid you are half inclined to ride 'pillion' with him; but what do you say to a hop-step-and-a-jump across the Channel? I've been planning it all out with brother Geoff, and, for once in my life, I think I shall have given you a pleasant surprise."

"You dear, darling, old John Bull, I should like it above all things! France has been a sealed book to us for such a long time that,

of course, every woman in England is dying with curiosity to see it."

"But you are such a good, patient Griselda that you would never have given me even so much as a hint that you wished to go."

"Well, no, dear; it would have been a leetle too unreasonable, even for *me*, when you had just indulged my whim for this charming place, to want you to take me away from it before we were well in it; besides, you good, kind old goose, how miserable you will be in a strange country without understanding more of its language than '*Bon jour*' and '*Parlez vous Francais?*'"

"All right, I've nerved myself for the shock; I've had it once or twice in my life when Johnny Frogs have attacked me suddenly with the latter question; and then, before I could say, '*Non je vous re-mash-tea;*' have poured out such a stream of gibbery-

gosh over my unlucky head that I felt like a man in a shower-bath; but 'who's afraid!' *You* can talk enough for two, in any lingo under the sun; besides, we'll take Carrie with us, and she'll help to protect her poor little uncle if the mounseers are too saucy. I shouldn't wonder if Noulaiton would go too, and then we should make quite a comfortable 'Little Britain' of our own wherever we went."

"Capital! and we'll take our tea with us, and insist upon toast, and instruct the benighted Gauls how (not) to cook a beefsteak."

"I suppose we shan't get a good glass o' port, Geoff," said William Langdale, ruefully.

"Not a chance! I think you had better decant a dozen into clean bottles and take with you."

"By Jove! good idea that," said the other,

brightening up. "Well, Nan, when shall it be? (The thing has got to be done, and the sooner we go, the sooner we shall be back.")

This latter part of the sentence was spoken, behind his hand, to Carrie, with an air of piteous woe, and a tone of resignation which made that young lady laugh outright.

"Now, William," said his wife, from whom this by-play could not be concealed, "I really will not victimize you by taking you abroad; let Dr. Noulaiton do cavalier to Carrie and me; he's old enough to be father to both of us; and then you can stay and have your quiet fishing."

"Very pretty, Mrs. William Langdale! very pretty indeed! and so you want to elope openly and in broad daylight with a gallant young Frenchman of three score years! I shouldn't have given even *you* credit for such bare-faced effrontery. No, ma'am! No! I'm

your natural protector, and in that character I intend to go with you, even if you went to Timbuctoo; and let me see the Johnny Crapaud that would dare to stare at you, much more touch you, and I'll eat him, stays and all, without any *sauce piquante.*" And William Langdale opened his vast jaws, and showed two rows of such powerful teeth, that really it did not look quite impossible for him to fulfil that threat.

"Oh, you frightfully ferocious 'boule-dog' I'm quite afraid to let you go with me. Now, if I do, you must promise, on your word, that you will not quarrel, and make me ridiculous."

"Keep 'em off, then, Mrs. William Langdale, keep 'em off, or I won't answer for their bones. But"—changing his tone and appealing to Carrie "but you will protect me, Carrie, won't you! Don't let the hairy Frenchies come kissing and embracing me; one of

them tried once when I'd given the poor devil a few guineas to save him from starving."

"I'll do my best, uncle," said Carrie, laughing; "and perhaps it would be as well for us to make a solemn league and covenant of mutual protection."

"I should think it would, indeed," said Pierce, somewhat grimly; "with all due deference to your fears, I think Miss Langdale will be in the greater danger."

"Ah, well, but then it comes naturally to the women; and I'm told they rather like it." (Pierce frowned horribly.) "But let any man try and kiss me, and I'll knock him down, sir, I'll knock him down!"

"Now, William, be quiet, be quiet; do not lash your sides and roar like that. Try and be sensible, if you can. You had better ask Noulaiton to get passports, and as for starting, you know from old experience, that I can

be ready at an hour's notice, especially for a journey to Paris, where, of course, Carrie and I will have ample opportunity to provide ourselves with the most charming new toilettes."

"Phew," whistled William Langdale, "that means a big roll of bank notes."

"Yes, sir; you surely would not think of taking your wife to France without providing her with a French roll."

"Ah, you mean that your *rôle* will be that of my Lady Spend-well."

"Could I do better than Spend-well?"

"You do everything well, my angel, my charmer!" exclaimed her husband, effusively. And turning to Lady Langdale—

"Was there ever a wife so clever, so lovely, so bewitching as mine?"

"You old goose," said the wife, with emphasis; whilst Lady Langdale quietly replied—

"Rather an embarrassing question to ask

one lady of another; but in this case I will answer you frankly 'No,' and," pretending a sigh, "I do not suppose my husband will contradict us."

This little "fish" was, unhappily, lost upon Sir Geoffrey, who was now urging upon the young men that it was high time to reassume their dried clothes and get ready to return. O'Sullivan and myself received the suggestion with becoming docility; but of the other three, Fallington pretended not to hear, Gilbert flushed, and bit his lip, whilst Pierce immediately began an animated conversation with Mrs. Langdale.

However, these little ruses did not serve to stave off the evil hour of parting for much longer, because it was obviously getting very late, and they felt that they could not reasonably trench too much on their kind host's indulgence. When re-equipped, in boating guise, they outrivalled each other in the num-

ber of times it was necessary to say "good-night." At last, with reluctant oars, slowly flashing in the moonlit waters, they faded gradually away into the misty distance, like Ulysses and his companions departing from the island of Calypso.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days after this Mr. William Langdale, Caroline, and Dr. Noulaiton went forth on their adventurous journey toward the *terra incognita* of "La Belle France." They arranged their journey to the coast so as to make it as pleasant as possible. The weather was deliciously warm and sunny, and so they decided to go in the open barouche and with their own horses by easy stages rather than post; for posting, even in those days, when the hacks were better kept and groomed than now, had still, in a degree, the unpleasant drawback of an odour more strong than fragrant when the beasts got heated with their work; and this, of

course, was more noticeable and disagreeable in an open carriage than a close chariot. There was no need for haste. The hideous, roaring, rushing, yelling monster, with its vast red-glaring eyes, and huge jointed-tail had not then maddened men into a frenzy of speed. "Hurry-on-the-Brain" was a disease as yet unknown, and "Paris in ten hours and a half" was not invented. Therefore, after a thoroughly enjoyed and well-appointed British breakfast, with its indispensable adjuncts of tea and toast, broiled bacon, and lightly boiled eggs, served on snowy damask, and in exquisite old china,—the barouche, with its two powerful, large-boned, high-bred Yorkshire bays, was ordered round, and our travellers took their places. William Langdale drove, with Carrie by his side; Mrs. Langdale and Dr. Noulaiton pairing off in the body, whilst Reeve the groom, and Janet Perkins the maid, occupied the rumble. The

Geoffrey Langdales and Mildred were to stay at the Villa during the absence of its owners, and I incline to think that William had had this in view for them, when he so suddenly and heroically volunteered to take his wife abroad. Partings under these circumstances are not anything like so long or so difficult as the partings recorded in our last chapter, and although the ladies might possibly have experienced a little choking sensation in the throat, when it came to the last kiss there were none but smiling tears—if tears at all. As for the men, a firm gripped handshake and a cheery, "God bless you Will," "God bless you Geoff," was all sufficient to assure each of what the other felt.

And so away rolled the happy little quartett through the charming lanes of Surrey into the still more lovely woodlands of Kent, making a detour through Hayes Common and

the Crays, and holding on the even tenor of their way until, at the good Old Crown at Sevenoaks, they arrived, with splendid appetites, for a four o'clock dinner. By a most singular coincidence it appeared that Mr. Pierce Falconer had imperative affairs which compelled him to be at Sevenoaks on that one special day out of all the other three hundred and sixty-four, and being in Sevenoaks at what other possible hotel could he reasonably have chosen to stay than the Crown? Of course Dr. Noulaiton, being a Frenchman, and therefore, by nature, taciturn and reticent, could not possibly have mentioned to Mr. Pierce that Sevenoaks was their first halting place; and, of course, Mr. Falconer, being a soldier, and a man of rapid action, had quite finished the urgent business which had brought him down before the arrival of the Langdales. Mr. Pierce had to run the gauntlet of this, and a good deal more of

quiet irony from William Langdale, but the iron did not enter his soul—for had not Caroline shown by her heightened colour and brightening eyes that this singular coincidence was not altogether disagreeable to her; and had not kind Mrs. Langdale welcomed him heartily, and proposed that he should take a place in the barouche to-morrow, and go on with them to Tunbridge Wells. Their *petit-diner* was about as bright and happy a meal as could well be conceived; Dr. Noulaiton was in the gayest spirits at the near prospect of returning to his beloved France, and all his misfortunes and troubles (of which he had still plenty) vanished into thinner air and merrier laughter than ever. Mrs. Langdale was sparkling with wit and diamonds; William Langdale told his raciest stories to an appreciating audience, and Pierce was in a seventh heaven, wherein

Caroline was the resident angel and he a happy visitant. This beatific condition did not, however, render him spoonily insensible to the creature comforts of a well-chosen dinner or to the merits of the grand brown sherry which the jolly old host decanted and put on with his own hands, and a great deal of ceremony. Neither was he so absorbed by love as to be insensible to the charms of wit and humour; indeed, the two young people contributed their quota to the general conversation, and were ready for attack or parry against all comers; occasionally doing a little light tilting against each other also; hence there was nothing of that slowly freezing dullness that creeps over a little "gathering" when one or two couples, consciously or unconsciously, relapse into a sweet meditative silence; with the expression on their countenances that "Love is Enough;" or merely break that silence with low confidential

whispers. Pierce and Caroline reserved that part of the performance for the summer evening stroll. After a due regard to an excellent dessert, another bottle of the brown sherry, and some coffee in the garden, our voyagers slowly sauntered out to enjoy the glories of the setting sun.

The veracious chroniclers of lovers' conversations are apt to forget how large a portion of that so-called "conversation" consists in a most "gracious silence;" a delicious mutual reverie broken only now and again by the low-whispered music of the voice, as, ever and anon, some more brilliant light touches the stony Memnon of the human heart and compels it to utter its wonder-stirred tones of admiration and joy. At such times the incessant flow of chippering chat to and fro from one to the other would seem a distressing weariness, a hideous impertinence. They stood in the presence of the

vast "light-giver," steeped in and transfigured by his glorious blaze watching with an exquisite delight the splendid transformation-scenes in golden and rose-coloured cloud-land. From the sunlighted aërial azure sea arose a jagged rock, and imagination conjured up an Andromeda chained, helplessly awaiting her dreadful fate; then sailing up from the north came a huge distorted thing, half-crocodile, half-dragon, with wide distended jaws; whereupon imagination again came to the rescue with a Perseus; then the dragon and the rock became an island of the blest, and Love alone remained rejoicing and rewarded. Yes, when Love has attuned the heart, the eyes "see more things in Heaven and earth than ever were there," but the tongues do not prattle much about them; a glance; a slight pressure of arm or hand; a whispered word or two, and all is told that either cares to hear. So let the sun go down

without any attempt to catalogue its various scenic effects upon the adjacent wood, the distant fields, and the silvern waters; for-although these varied beauties were drank deeply into the very heart of hearts of the young lovers, and rejoiced in with a pure, exalted, and exalting joy, they spake not much of these; or of aught else. Thought is subtler than speech; and perfect sympathy needs little telling.

The evening drama closed; the wondrous magician slowly disappeared below the horizon, to carry round his daily miracle of light and life to the other lands; the dew came down with its delicious freshness, and the soft twilight drew its slowly darkening curtain over all the small events—the speech, the thoughts, the silences of the day that was now dead.

CHAPTER IV.

RINGING loudly up from the hall of the hotel, went the cheery stentorian voice of William Langdale, who utterly forgetting or ignoring that he was not in his own house, shouted—

"Ann! Ann! the carriage is at the door, and the horses are worried to death with the flies."

"What a dear, troublesome old fidget you are," said the lady, descending the stairs, attired in the most charming of cool summer *toilettes*, "do be quiet, sir, and behave yourself, or the other people will think you have escaped from Bedlam."

"I have escaped from bed, lamb, a long time ago," retorted the incorrigible, "and if

we don't start soon we shall be in for a hot noon drive; to-day will be a 'smoker' you may depend upon it."

"Well, well, you old botherer, now we are quite ready; have you paid the bill?"

"No, my charmer, you know I always depend upon you to see if it is right," and then with a nudge, and a huge wink at Dr. Noulaiton, he said in a loud aside—

"The old woman rates me ferociously if I pay a few shillings too much."

"Yes, sir, I do, and you deserve it; not that the shillings are of any consequence to you, but by squandering them weakly in this way you demoralise both Boniface and his servants; besides, it is unfair towards other travellers, who are forthwith looked upon as mean, because they are not foolishly lavish."

"Madame is perfectly right," said Dr. Noulaiton, "I can speak feelingly; what possible civility or attention can we poor

emigrés expect, when you, milord Anglaise, fling your money about as if it was dirt ?"

" I, too, must have a thrust at you, sir," said Pierce, " in this quarrel. We poor fellows who live upon that very slender resource called 'our wits,' are simply suffocated by the golden youth of the age ; who buy outward adulation and inward derision from every underling with whom they come in contact."

" It would not matter so much if the folly were confined to the veritable golden 'youths;' but bankers' clerks and shopmen are weak-minded enough to follow the example without the means, and grandly fling away shillings when they can barely afford pence."

" Bless my soul !" said William Langdale, " here's a bother about pence and shillings. I dare say you are all perfectly right, and it's very wrong ; here ostler !" (tossing him half a sovereign as he mounted on to the box) " catch that you rascal and let 'em go."

Caroline laughed at this odd settlement of the argument, and I'm afraid, sided with William Langdale, even whilst pretending to be shocked.

As they drove on to Tunbridge Wells, the day turned steamily hot, and when they arrived at the Calverley Hotel, they felt rather stifled with the soft thick-piled carpets, the ponderously grand and gloomy side-boards, and the massive chairs of maroon velvet; more especially as all these household gods showed more or less of the dust of ages on their surfaces whenever a sly ray of sunshine could get through the darkened blinds to peep at them. Dusty magnificence on a hot day is decidedly depressing, and this depression was increased by the prim acidulated piety of the chambermaids, and the lugubrious obsequity of the waiters—waiters who glided solemnly in and out like ghosts in tail-coats, or like undertakers in

the enjoyment of a perpetual funeral, and answered every demand for bread, salt, or wine with the stereotyped phrase of "If you please, sir!" "If you please, madam!" William Langdale forced a small joke of the haziest kind, in order to give himself and the others an excuse for laughing; an excuse of which they gladly availed themselves, and with a laughter wholly incommensurable with the minute amount of wit or humour on which it was ostensibly based. Meantime the preternaturally solemn servitors stood behind their chairs, growing more cadaverously gloomy every moment; probably from a shrewd suspicion that they were themselves the real causes of this unusual mirth; a mirth in their eyes, evidently as indecorous as it was unusual. When the turbot was served, it happily suggested to Dr. Noulaiton the story which was then both fresh and veracious, of the benevolent old lady who

had purchased a dubious fish from a rogue of a fishmonger. This rascal, knowing that he had one of the softest of the soft sex to deal with, and knowing that his turbot was also soft and flabby from its staleness, had skilfully inserted a long piece of whalebone into its body, so as to give it the firm elasticity of a fresh fish. The too confiding old lady, seeing this apparent proof of freshness, after a feeble and futile attempt at bargaining, made the purchase, and in due course the whaleboned-turbot was served up at her table; she had only used her eyes in the purchase, but she was now disagreeably compelled to use her nose; so holding that organ with one hand, she rang violently at the bell with the other, for her servant to take the nasty thing away. Now it so happened that her servant, an astute maid of all work, was on the very best terms with Mr. Pike, the fishmonger, and the more so as Christmas was

approaching, and "boxes" of various dimensions loomed up in the near future; hence, when the mistress descended to her larder next morning full of ire anent the turbot, Mrs. Cookey produced the whalebone with the ingenious suggestion that the unhappy fish, in a fit of hunger, or temporary insanity, had swallowed this curious article of diet, and that it had disagreed with him. The dear kindly old lady swallowed this monstrous "cram" as glibly as the poor dead fish had swallowed the whalebone, and putting on her bonnet and pattens, toddled off to Mr. Pike.

"Oh! Mr. Pike," she exclaimed, "oh, Mr. Pike! what do you think? that turbot you sent me yesterday, oh, it was horrid! horrid!! I never did, in all my days, have anything so nasty sent up to my table."

Pike was beginning the usual string of

protests, when she stopped him off short, with an—

"Oh, but I don't blame you, my good man, for what do you think? the poor creature had actually swallowed a piece of whalebone nearly as long as itself!!! Oh, I don't blame you, but how the poor thing must have suffered!!!"

Pike's tongue instinctively went into his cheek, but he managed to turn up the whites of his eyes, and lift up both his hands in well-feigned astonishment, and echoed the old lady's words with an—

"Ah! dear! how the poor thing must have suffered!"

"Yes," repeated the old lady, as she turned pensively away, "how the poor thing must have suffered!"

Pike relieved his pent up feelings by two gigantic winks at the retreating bonnet, and by the muttered observation of—

"Well, I never! You are a green old gal —you are."

William Langdale capped this story with two or three still more absurd, until, at last, the mute waiter behind his chair, vainly trying to smother his sense of the ridiculous, broke into an explosive guffaw, and, in so doing, sputtered on William Langdale's bald crown. The latter jumped up, partly in real, and partly in mimic rage, and, seizing a monstrous carving knife, chevied the unlucky waiter twice round the table, and finally, out of the room, uttering maledictions upon him for "daring to sputter upon a gentleman." Mrs. Langdale was, for once, seriously angry with this mad-cap antic, and Caroline, so truly alarmed that she clung to Pierce's arm, and, at the same time, most illogically entreated him to prevent any mischief. However, the gentle giant made a humble apology to the ladies; and I'm inclined to think that

Mr. Pierce rather more than forgave him,—without being asked.

The evening passed over without any other escapades; William Langdale's face assumed a comical semi-penitence in its expression, and he avowed himself "a sadder, but a wiser man;" both of which attributes were much doubted by the rest of the little party. The three elders gradually became drowsy with the oppressive heat and the soporific influence of the place, and William Langdale, after sleepily remarking that "the sofa reminded him of a coffin, the sideboard of a highly ornamented tomb, and the room altogether of a family vault," finally yielded to the somnolence, and dreamt that he was "assisting" at his own funeral, and "tipping" the mutes as they stood at his own front door.

Meantime, the two young people sat at the wide opened windows, alternating reverie with whispered words, and gazing dreamily at

the stars as they came out. Pierce "wondered if these stars, as they seem to peer down into our eyes, do indeed see or influence the destinies of men and nations." Caroline wondered "which of them would be our first home after earth." Of course each, as they gave broken utterance to their thoughts, perceived, even in the utterance, how vague and nebulous their ideas were, but Pierce endeavoured to defend his, by saying that—

"Although the mere shining worlds themselves could have no sight nor influence, yet, from any, or all of these, the 'All Seeing' might be looking down into the very depths of our souls, and knowing our thoughts before we speak them. For," said he, "it has never seemed to me an unreasonable imagining that the glorious and beneficent God of the universe should gladden the higher orders of his creatures by His Absolute Presence in their respective worlds."

"Indeed, no," said Caroline, "He deigned to visit our first parents in Paradise, and, therefore, your imagining may truly be a splendid reality in those happier spheres above us, whose inhabitants may be still dwelling in their Edens."

"Cannot one conceive with what an ecstatic joy such pure and happy 'existences' would welcome the Giver of all Gladness? Would not their seas assume a delicious calmness, their mountains be touched by an ineffable blaze of light; their fountains leap high and exultingly into the air; their birds carol exquisite music; their very trees and flowers burst into richest bloom at the approach and progress of The Creator of All? But better far, the joys of the higher Creature; for would He not scatter amongst them like '*largesse*,' and, with a lavish profusion, grander possibilities of hope, nobler

rewards of action, brilliant imaginings, and intensely vivid insights?"

"Such insights as come to us poor mortals, perchance, twice or thrice in a life."

"Yes; then, to us, how feebly and afar off, and like yonder shooting star, these visions of light merely flash and vanish, quenched in the sordid cares of earth. During one such flash of insight, years ago, I became vividly conscious of the millions of angel-presences hovering and speeding on their wondrous missions to the souls of men through the vast ocean of the air. A vision of sparkling wings, of lovely forms and faces, of deep, penetrating tender eyes, full of angelic wonder, joy and pity. Mingling with the sound of softly, swiftly rushing wings, came strains of music, so penetrating and subtle, that the soul seemed to be steeped in rapture, and lifted and borne heavenward on a cloud of melody; every mortal feeling

seemed intensified, etherealized; every power strung to such fine tension, that the mere *volition* of thought created the *action*, and produced the *result*, without effort, strain, or exhaustion. Merely to *will* a great deed was enough, the deed was done; its grand results, its beneficent influences standing up in visible existence, or scattered far and wide, like a shower of pearls."

"How enchanting such a vision! But had you time to be conscious of all this at once?"

"Time and space seemed annihilated. Power reigned supreme; the mind went forth like a bird on the wing, and ranged the earth at will; even the sight of the face that was dead, and the touch of a 'vanished hand' was granted to the mortal yearning that still held its place in my heart. Yes, the voices of the lost and loved spoke to my o'erstrung ear in their well-remembered tones, and their touch thrilled me to the heart."

"Strange, most strange!"

"True, most true, oh, loved one! And why should it not be so? Is it not difficult to believe that this vast ocean of air, in the profoundest depths of which we mortals live, and move, and have our being, was created merely that we might breathe an infinitesimal portion of it; or that mere birds and insects might disport themselves in a fractional part of its enormous space? Is all that 'vasty deep' an utter void? Are there none of God's creatures in it, simply because, to our limited vision and earth-dulled senses, these are, only at rare intervals, visible or audible?"

"Certainly," said Caroline, "there is much in the Book of Books which shadows forth this possibility. When the Patriarch saw the angels ascending and descending it might well be that by the transient exaltation of the power of sight he was then per-

mitted to see, not a mere visionary show, produced for him to see and then to be abolished, but a real and absolute passing glimpse of what was, and is, for ever happening."

"So with all other of the multitudinous records of angels made visible and audible to man! Climaxed, as these records are, by the Angel-Choir at the Birth, and the ministering Angels after the Temptation."

"Is it not too flippant and foolish to say of such visions that they were the products of a heated imagination? I have 'heard Sir Oracles' and would-be-men-of-the-world dismiss the whole subject with a superior wave of the hand, and the convenient sneer of 'heated imagination!'"

"A most useful phrase, with which dull-eyed Apathy endeavours to pull down the whole world to its own dead-level, and then sapiently looks round with an air of melancholy triumph, exclaiming, 'see how dull it

is!' splendidly unconscious that the fault 'is not in the stars, but in themselves, that they are underlings.'"

"Not in the stars, indeed; for it needs only to look up to them to see how immense is the possible."

"Rather may we not say how immense is the real? The mere distances and varied vastnesses of those twinkling specks are so stupendous, and yet so certain, that the brain reels when it attempts to grasp the idea of the infinite space through which they move; and think also what never-ending diversities of living forms must inhabit each distinct planet of all those millions of suns."

"I have never thought of that," said Caroline; "but of course it must be so."

"Most surely! Creatures like ourselves, and like the beasts, birds and fishes of this world, could not exist for one moment in any of the other planets of our own system, or any

other system in the whole universe; hence each world must be tenanted by totally strange and new creations."

"Eternity itself does not now seem too long a time for us to visit all these worlds in turn and behold all their wonders."

"Have you ever reflected how little of our own world, in these our little lives, even the wisest and most energetic of men can really know? Look at the greatest traveller, the profoundest man of science; the first is but a kind of travelled ant, who has trailed with great difficulty and danger a slender thread around an Alp; and the second merely another kind of voyager, who, whilst patiently tracing up one of the myriad streams of knowledge to its source, slowly feels his powers fail, his sight grow dim, and the scroll of knowledge drop from his age-enfeebled grasp, to roll up again undeciphered."

"Shall we, then, revisit our own world,

when gifted with the higher powers of immortal life, to see and enjoy all its glorious scenes and understand all its marvels?"

"I think so; possibly even now, as we speak, myriads of those beings who have dwelt for a mere speck of time on this vast orb, and passed away from it, knowing nothing, understanding nothing, of its splendour may be hovering to and fro upon the earth, learning all that may be learnt of its foregone mysteries, its present powers, its inner and outward marvels; hovering, it may be, around us, their children, watching with joy the dawnings of thought, of light, and purity in our souls, or flying, with an angelic sorrow from our words of anger or deeds of darkness."

"In the severer trials of our lives, where the strong feeling of being 'tempted' forces itself upon the mind, a vague sense of mystic 'presences' does undoubtedly haunt us."

"A sense so instinctive, so universal, that it can hardly be false, and one that can be turned to noblest uses. Why should it not be absolutely true that we are, indeed, surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—God's angels, 'Messengers of light,'—sent to afford us poor mortals, as we grope our way through this night-march called 'Life,' some faint glimmerings of the coming dawn."

"No thought could, perhaps, sustain us so well through our journey as this."

"And what reason, or what wisdom is there in refusing such help and such light, or scaring our good angels away with a sceptical sneer? May I try to tell you how often this sense of angel-visitants has cheered me in the gloomiest trials of my life? On those dark days when I had resigned all hope of you for ever; when the heavens were as lead, and the voices of men as the croak of ravens, even then, in my silences and solitudes, they com-

forted me, for they seemed to whisper, 'Wait! Life is short; eternity unending. A little while and the film will fall from thine eyes; a little while and the hard tones of this lower life will be heard no more; but a diviner music will again lift your soul into rapture; a little while and all this agony will pass away and be merged in the joy unspeakable of purest unblamed love; a little while and the loved eyes will gaze into thine, and the tender hand again be laid upon thy brow.'"

"And so, sir! you now presume to think they told you truly, only that their prophecy was fulfilled in this world rather than the next."

"A thousand blessings on them for their happy augury; thus more happily fulfilled! When your most kindly-gracious mother gained for me Sir Geoffrey's leave to renew my suit to you, then, indeed, a divine music

seemed to fill the air. Yes; then the sun burst forth with sudden splendour, the air became an ocean of delight crisp, sparkling, brilliant, and made sweet and rare with heavenly odours; even to breathe was joy! The dull, prosaic earth whereon I walked seemed instinct with a new, elastic life, and bore me on its surface boundingly. The trees and flowers rose into the air like founts of beauty, and around them birds gathered and shook down sparkling drops of joy. All colours, forms and sounds of outward things assumed a new and deep intensity

> "'Reflecting the bright hues within my soul,
> And echoing the music in my heart.'"

"I wonder you dare quote from so sad a tale as 'The Story of a Life,' lest the same fate that broke poor Arnold's short bright dream of love should befal you."

"I fear not that, and the writer, in those few words, so exactly expressed the joy I

felt that I could scarcely attempt to tell it in other words."

"You have a good memory, sir, if you have not drawn your picture of yourself from your own imagination."

"When one man has a strong sympathy with another, the difficulty is rather in forgetting than in remembering. I have never learnt by *rote* a single passage from Shakspeare; and yet, if you were to cross-examine me as to any of his plays, and give me a passage, I could tell you in what play it was, and in what part of it, and probably quote the sequent passages until you were tired."

"That would be very soon, and I shall not put your memory to the test. We women much prefer imagination, however humble, to memory, however retentive."

"We, of the coarser sex, on the contrary, much prefer the memory of, say for example,

kisses, to the imagination of them; and still more, the reality to either."

"Be quiet, sir! You must be content with the memory, for the present. See! see! Mr. Langdale is awake!"

Pierce wished Mr. Langdale at the—Antipodes—or further off still, just at that critical moment; for their long chat had slid gracefully down from the delightfully sublime to the deliciously ridiculous; but his wish was not gratified, and so he had to make the best of his disappointment. By a certain sympathy in such matters, Mrs. Langdale roused from her nap at the same time as her husband, and Dr. Noulaiton also awoke with a laugh from a merry dream.

Caroline had a vague suspicion that Mrs. Langdale had only been shamming sleep for the last part of the time, and Pierce had also the same idea, but that hardened young

sinner did not care in the least about that; the sham was just a good as the fact, in his view, and he only wished William Langdale had shammed also, for at least a few minutes longer.

A few rather hazy and sleepy jokes, which were not much laughed at, and then liqueurs, chamber-candlesticks, and "good-nights" closed another delightful day; and then? Oh, then, the souls of the lovers, escaping from their wearied bodies, and companioned by their guardian angels, held higher and more ethereal converse in the land of dreams, closer up to the stars.

CHAPTER V.

PARADISE-ON-THAMES.

HAS it been recorded that Mr. Fallington's fortunes, by a disagreeable twist of the wheel (not altogether unprecedented in our artificial state of society), were now very close down to the ground? To use a homely proverb, "All taking out of the meal tub and none putting in, sooner or later must come to the bottom."

It had taken four generations of this highly patrician, but slightly imprudent, mode of living, to come to the bottom in Fallington's case, but I do not think the final *descensus* was any the more agreeable for its long post-

ponement. It is, to say the best of it, a dubious consolation to know that one's great-great-great-great-grandfather had a fine, unencumbered estate, and a very comfortable rent-roll; possibly, far from being a consolation, it is one of those "comparisons" that are especially "odious." A penniless peer is a peripatetic anachronism; he feels that at the particular epoch of time, at which he has cropped up to the surface of life, he is neither useful nor ornamental; that, in fact, he ought to have lived one or two hundred years ago, and that he has neither the excuse of business or pleasure for being alive at all.

A noble family, in reduced circumstances, is somewhat in the predicament of a poor old man who, in middle age, had been unwise enough to buy an annuity for a term of years instead of for life; the term of years expired before the man, who was, thenceforward, reduced to the painful necessity of perambula-

ting the streets with a dog and a hat, and invoking charity with the quaint appeal of—

"Pity the poor man who lived longer than he intended!"

"Pity the poor man who lived longer than he intended!"

Now it must not be inferred that Mr. Fallington went about with a dog and a hat, or with any such appeal; that immaculate young gentleman went about with a hat, of course, but it was always of the glossiest, and of the newest fashion; and he carried it on his head, instead of putting it in his dog's mouth. He wore it well, too, with just the exact angle of one-sidedness prescribed and followed by the *haut-ton*.

Now, there is a good deal in this; all observers of men and manners, must have remarked how much class and character is re-

vealed in the cock of the hat. The Cabinet Minister; the merchant, whose argosies are on all the seas; the manufacturer, with many "ventures" out, and still more children at home, are apt to affect capacious, well-weathered hats, which they wear chiefly sloping backwards off their foreheads at angles varying from 30 to 45 degrees. The leaders of fashion, men-about-town, members of the Stock Exchange and militaires are all more or less fickle and fantastical in the matter of head-gear. No sooner have they arrived at a style and form that seems convenient and becoming than they evince a restless impatience until they have discarded it utterly for something totally different High crowns, low crowns, no crowns, peaky and pointy, penthousy and top-heavy; broad-brim, narrow-brim and no brim at all to speak of; flappy and flat, straight and all round, curled and crooked; fluffy as a poodle, or smooth and

glistening like my lady's satin skirt; there is evidently "no rest for the wicked" in this infinite diversity of hats, and one would be inclined to infer that these fantastical folk have assuredly got hat-on-the-brain, metaphorically as well as in fact.

But besides this ceaseless change of the hats themselves, there is an almost equal variety of changes in the mode of "cocking" them. Now to one side, now to the other; now tilted forward ferociously, now tilted back sapiently, and each with such nice gradations of the various angles, that none but those "golden youths" who are enabled by fortune to make dress the one absorbing study of their lives, can ever succeed in exactly catching the corrcct one.

Woe to the ambitious lawyer's clerk, or the admiring shop boy, who, after seeing a fop of the first water, with a new angle of "cockiness" on his head, strives hard to imitate

that exact poise; hopeless grief attends the presumptuous youth! An exaggeration of an hair's breadth, either to the one side or the other, to the back or to the front, oversteps the thin frontier-line that separates the sublime from the ridiculous, and he fails ignominiously, and "unpitied of his peers."

Doubtless, as Mr. Fallington sauntered down the shady side of Pall Mall, on one fine summer morning, with a new hat and a despondent heart, many an admiring youth envied him the former; and knew nothing of the latter. But Fallington himself, according to his wont, had wholly forgotten the hat, as soon as it was once nicely adjusted, but could not so easily forget that he had a heart, and that it was rather heavy. Now, this heaviness was partly attributable to the inconvenient lightness of his purse, and partly to a very natural craving for a few words of encouragement from Mildred

Langdale. He had not much hope that this craving would be gratified, for Miss Mildred was still a very proud and decided young lady, and had refused his suit all the more haughtily when he ventured to renew it after her father's ruin. But, the Richmond coach came up; there was a vacant seat on the box, and, gulping down his pride, he mounted, determined to chance a visit and a question.

"Hang it," thought he, as he ruminated on his situation. "I'm now as poor as they are, she can't have any reason for refusing me now—unless—" Here some half-a-dozen disagreable "unlesses" came slowly looming up through his rather foggy condition of mind, to his utter bewilderment and complete depression.

The loquacious red-nosed coachman, by whose side he was thus ignominiously sitting, could get nothing out of him but a few monosyllabic answers, which answers were wholly

irrespective of the questions, to which Fallington did not even pretend to listen.

Rosy-nosed Jehu, therefore, gave him up as a bad job, and concluded that his box-companion had lost heavily at Crockford's, or on the turf.

Alighting at the gate of Paradise from a Richmond coach is by no means suggestive of the Miltonic Satan; and yet, perhaps, the poor young fellow, in his small way, was as full of despondency, *pro. tem.*, as that highly interesting, but very improper spirit. Moreover, he felt painfully conscious of his deficiency in that serpentine wisdom, and those powers of persuasion possessed by his great prototype. Instead, therefore, of flying over the wall, he simply rang the bell, and enquired if Lady Langdale was at home.

"Only Miss Mildred, sir," said Perkins.

"Only Miss Mildred!" thought Fallington. "What an only!" Then aloud to Perkins—

"Take my card and ask Miss Mildred if I may see her 'for a few minutes?'"

Like a faithful watch-dog distrusting a wolf, Perkins metaphorically laid back one ear, laid his head on one side, and was beginning to show his teeth, when Mildred herself, with a basket of rare flowers, came in from the garden, and answered the question in person, by inviting Mr. Fallington into the drawing-room, where she was about to arrange her flowers.

Perkins disappeared into his kennel with a smothered growl, and Fallington experienced a sudden rush of emotions that, for a time, took his breath away, and only left him the use of his eyes. He made good use of those, however, whilst Mildred distributed her flowers amongst the little china vases.

The once slight girl had now assumed the indescribable charm of early womanhood;

whilst her high culture, and natural pride of character were just touched, toned down, and softened by the hand of past sorrows, and the shadows of troubles, nobly borne; giving deeper depths of expression to her bonny blue eyes, and an additional grace of movement to her perfected figure.

It will be remembered, from their conversation at Mrs. Helmores' ball, that the lessons of life and time had not been altogether wasted on Fallington either; and the stern discipline of events had taken many of the early follies and fopperies out of him. 'Tis true he was not, and never would be a Solon, but, on the other hand, he was no longer a mere Solon's "Goose." His mind had fairly developed such powers as it possessed, but of these, anything approaching logical accuracy or sequence, was, perhaps, the most conspicuous (by its absence;) he could observe shrewdly, even keenly; he could think

accurately, and with good taste; but he could not bring observation and thought together so as to reflect or reason; there was a species of mental hiatus, an "ambiguous middle term" in his intellect, which precluded all probability of high effort, or large result. This had been shown most markedly when he joined our Debating Society. In debate he was, perhaps, the most aggravating person imaginable; he could tell us what he had observed; he could explain what he thought; but the two processes had no more connection than Tenterden Steeple and Goodwin Sands.

Happily, for Fallington, love-making is the most illogical process that was ever conceived. If a handsome fellow can tell a lovely girl what he has observed and what he thinks; the lady herself is the only "ambiguous middle" term, and fills up the syllogism with the most charming perfection. Imagination

in such cases, dispenses with reason, and jumps to conclusions. Given an elegantly appointed room, filled with the rich perfume of delicate flowers; softened sunshine and a sweet southern breeze flowing in gently through the wide-opened French windows, a smooth, green lawn, and shimmering trees, a sparkling sunlighted river streaming silently along. Given, also aye, and what a gift is this! a graceful girl of singular beauty, and a handsome young fellow of good birth, and good breeding, and, then, is it so very wonderful that Mildred, with all her keen wit and clear intellect, should, amid these pleasant surroundings waive logic, and listen to Love?

It would have been more wonderful had not a growing kindness towards Fallington, and an increasing hope of aiding him to attain to higher tones of thought, gradually attuned her heart for this broken music.

Yet, that music would not have been listened to had not circumstances, within only the last few days, seemed to promise a happier future for Sir Geoffrey's fortunes—the main reason, therefore, for her former rejection, seemed to be breaking up like a cloudy day, and letting in some welcome gleams of hope.

As for Fallington, the joy of a school-boy reprieved from a severe castigation, released from an awful imposition, sent out for a perpetual holiday with unlimited "tips," was as nothing to his—and when, after a stay of hours that seemed but seconds, he returned on foot to London, he had the greatest possible difficulty in restraining himself to anything like a respectable walk. His impulse was to run, to jump, to vault over five-barred gates and back again; almost to stand on his head or turn Catherine-wheels. He did none of these absurdities except one furtive vault over a gate when no one was

looking. If his pockets had not been already empty they would have been so, long before he again reached Pall Mall; for the yearning desire to go into cottages and give the people something to make them happy was strong upon him almost to the pitch of pain.

It was, indeed, true that Sir Geoffrey's ebb-tide of fortune had shown its first symptom of reflux. The patient labours of twenty years the sleuth-hound tenacity of purpose, the anxious days, the sleepless nights, the lavished wealth, the self-denied pleasures were, at last, beginning to "tell," upon the monstrous inertia of his great "world's-work." Out of the millions that this work would save for his country a few hundreds were beginning to dribble back into his shrivelled exchequer. The "bread had been cast upon the waters, and was returning after many days."

Perhaps there are not more than half a

score of keen observers of men and their doings in the whole kingdom who have the faintest conception what it means to battle with a difficult problem for twenty years. At the outset the man who would fain do his country some good service is despised as a dreamy Utopian, or smiled at as a harmless enthusiast. His neighbours, friends, and family all concur in thinking him very foolish for sacrificing the ordinary pleasures of a town or country life—wasting fine summer days in tracing back "what men have done;" and foregoing gay evening amusements in order to see "what man may do." Then, a few years pass on of quiet unobtrusive investigation; during which the Plodder keeps on "never-minding" what people think or say of him; a good many headaches (and heartaches too) have to be cheerfully borne, and the lines and furrows of the mouth and brow grow sharper and sterner, and a few streaks of

gray hair begin to show themselves. But, gradually, some new and striking possibility begins to make itself known as a demonstrable fact; and a little light, like the silver streak in the cloud, is let into the world. The Despisers and the Smilers simultaneously begin to find out that "there was really something in So-and-so's idea after all," but "then you know it's only a toy; it can never come into practical use!" "It's only his Hobby! Poor fellow!" Thus, as the first reward of his labours, he finds himself classified with the aimable old gentlemen who fill water-butts with teaspoons, or waste a king's ransom on cracked crockery. But a few more years of trials, failures, half-successes, and, still bitterer failures; a few more headaches and heartaches, and an ever increasing drain of more and more gold,—and the Utopian dream stands forth as a tangible reality. The poor despised "Hobby" turns out

to be a veritable Pegasus; the scoffed at "Toy," a widely acknowledged Power. A great want has been supplied, a new industry inaugurated, and a hitherto unimagined creation stands upon the earth in the light of the sun. And then! Oh, then the New Power comes to grief in unskilled, rash hands; is shamefully misused by double-cunning, self-conceited "Experts;" and the luckless Author of it has to bear all the blame and all the loss of others' mistakes. Meantime, professional owls and ravens, jays and tom-tits, gather around this new thing, and stare and hoot, and chatter and chipper, and pick at this, and peck at the other, to their hearts' exceeding great content; and then go to their hiding places to concert plans for robbing the Inventor of his hard-earned, scant return.

Ah, well! It was always so! I dare say Tubal-cain had some Jerry Sneak of

an (un) civil engineer who tried to take the wind out his first trumpet; and Vulcan, when he forged the bolts of Jove, doubtless had some Brummagem competitor, who made a bad imitation of the thunder and stole a little lightning to tip them with.

However, Sir Geoffrey had nearly run the gauntlet of all these agreeable rewards which a grateful country showers down so lavishly on its benefactors, and was able, at last, to cheer his lady-wife and children with some little gleams of success. Hence it was that Mildred had relented of her former proud determination, and that Fallington had gone back to his chambers a wiser and a gladder man.

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN BULL IN FRANCE.

"ANN! Ann! what on earth do these little French frogs mean by jumping about in this devil's-dance round me and squeaking out 'donny maw kich-shows?'"

"*Va donc, va donc, garçons,*" said the lady, coming up to the rescue of her bewildered giant. "*Allez-vous-en, toute-suite,*" and at the same time flinging a few half-pence to a considerable distance, her bad French and good money sent the little caperers off at full speed for a wild scramble; accompanied by such an efflorescence of Gallic squeaks and shrieks as would have done credit

to a wagon-load of monkeys ; then taking her giant in tow she piloted him out of the equivocal street, into which he had helplessly floundered, and in which he strongly resembled a stranded whale surrounded by a shoal of minnows. They (the quartett) had arrived in Calais on the previous evening, after leaving Mr. Pierce disconsolately waving his hat on the white cliffs of Albion; and whilst the ladies and Dr. Noulaiton were making a few purchases William Langdale, always impatient of shopping, had wandered off down a back street of the dirty dingy little town, and it was by a happy accident alone that the others found him. For conceive the utter helplessness of even the largest and rosiest Briton, when utterly incapable of understanding a word that any one said to him, and with an almost equal incapacity of making his few words of French comprehended in return. At

the *table d'hôte*, which to the average Englishman of those days, was a thing of unutterable and bewildering strangeness, the gentle giant ran a considerable risk of starving in the midst of plenty; for every time he turned his head to make a joke or ask a question, a nimble-fingered *garçon* whisked away his half-finished plate and replaced it with an empty one, in preparation for the next course. At last he discovered a plan of baffling this rapid manœuvre by laying both hands on his plate before venturing to look off from it. But the thin, sloppy soups, and the disguised, flimsy courses that followed it, were not at all the good solid sustenance for a man of his capacity; and even of these he partook sparingly, with a horrid suspicion that they were probably compounded of frogs. The Doctor maliciously kept up this hallucination in his mind by laughingly describing the

infinite varities of *plats* which a good *chef* could concoct out of this delicate edible ; and with deeper malice forbore to explain that these dishes were such costly adjuncts to a dinner that they were not at all likely to make their appearance at a provincial *table d'hôte.* Poor Langdale was, moreover, righteously disgusted to see some of the guests deliberately picking their teeth with their forks; whilst one fearfully haughty and ferocious-looking Grand Duke, who was served in semi-state, and apart from the main table, still further outraged all sense of decency by noisily rinsing his mouth from, and into, his finger-glass. Langdale called him a "nasty beast," on the spot, in a very audible whisper, but as, happily, no one understood that term of endearment, excepting his own party, neither a row nor a duel ensued. The bluff Briton and the hawk-nosed nobleman exchanged scowls of inexplicable hatred and contempt,

but that was all. The climax of disgust for the former was reached when, instead of having the cloth cleared and sitting over a quiet bottle of wine, all the guests dispersed directly the dinner was over. Anything so supremely cheerless and uncomfortable he had never in his life seen or imagined. To think that he was to have thin, sour, wishy-washy stuff that they called wine at his dinner, and nothing after it but a little cup of black coffee and a glass of brandy, was too much for his philosophy ; and when the *garçon* brought round the bottle of cognac Langdale laid hold of it with a leonine grip, and motioning to the dapper fellow to bring him a tumbler and some hot water, he concocted such a stiff "sou-wester," that the astonished little Frenchman underwent a complete paroxysm of shrugs. Langdale kept the bottle for the chance of wanting such another

" brew," and pressed Dr. Noulaiton to follow his example and keep him in company ; he insisted on " Ann " having a wine glass of the potent beverage, and Caroline a sip or two ; the former lady was not sorry to have the equivalent for her two glasses of brown sherry. Later on they adjourned to the theatre, for lack of anything else to do, and as poor Langdale could not understand a word of what was said, he thought the actors and actresses the greatest idiots he had ever seen. After gaping at them open-mouthed for some time, and wondering whether he was not the victim of a sham nightmare, he dropped off and experienced all the horrors of a real one. Awaking with a start at the burst of final applause, he drew the eyes of the dispersing audience to their box by a ponderous expletive, uttered with considerable emphasis and vigour.

Another steaming tumbler followed the *petit-souper*, and then our tired travellers separated for the night.

Mrs. Langdale was partially en déshabille, and was standing at the looking glass arranging to her satisfaction a most bewitching little night-cap, when, to her astonishment, and her husband's rage, in walked a great hulking "boots" or *commissionare*, who without the slightest apology, began a long explanation as to the arrangements required for travelling forward on the morrow.

"Get out, you rascal," roared William Langdale, "get out! Don't you see my wife, undressing?"

"*Plait il m'sieu?*" asked the imperturbable Boots.

"Get into bed, Ann! Get out! you impudent scoundrel!"

"*Pardon M'sieu, je ne comprends. Que voulez vous pour demain?*"

"Be off you!" said the giant, trying another form of words, "or I'll kick you downstairs."

Mrs. Langdale felt the colour tingling to her cheeks and elbows, but fearing a scene, she explained hurriedly to the Boots, something, anything, as to to-morrow, and requested him to leave the room, which he did with many shrugs of bewilderment.

With low thunderous growls of slowly-subsiding wrath, the angered giant gradually assumed the night costume of the period, which was a much more elaborate one than in our degenerate days, and always climaxed by the night cap.

Now William Langdale's night cap was not exactly that "thing of beauty" which Keats has been good enough to inform

us "is a joy for ever," but it was one of vast proportions, and bright red hue, drawn closely down over his shaggy eyebrows, and extending thence upward in fine conical proportions, until it culminated in a lofty, perkety peak. Upon the extreme apex of this cone a little round tassel, about the size of a cherry, bobbled about in a very satisfactory and defiant manner. Armed thus, literally *cap-à-pied*, the tired warrior plunged heavily into the small single bed, which he had already anathematized for its smallness, and its singleness. The poor little French bed, possibly resenting the abuse thus bestowed upon it, or possibly wishing to revenge itself on "perfidious Albion" in the person of one of her stalwart sons, gave way beneath the weight and suddenness of his impact with a startling crash, and the sound of many splinterings.

"Hi! here! help! Ann! Ann! they're going to murder me. They're going to murder us. Hi! help! thieves! robbers! help!"

Thus, and with other wild ejaculations, lay the prostrate and struggling monster, his heavy swathings of flannel impeding his movements, and his night-cap drawn down over his eyes, completely blinding him. Attracted by his cries came a rush of chamber-maids and *garçons*, shrilling, jabbering, gesticulating, whilst his wife was endeavouring to extricate him from his uncomfortable position. As soon as he could push his night-cap high enough to see, he was more than ever impressed that this mob of natives were bent upon robbing and murdering them. Thereupon he redoubled his shouts, and at the same time, seizing pillows, bolster, carpet-bags, boots and whatever else came to hand,

he hurled them viciously at the crowd, following them up with a roar and a rush, which speedily cleared the apartment.

With many other small adventures of a like nature, which Dr. Noulaiton related to us afterward, our quartett journeyed through France to Paris ; stayed in that huge bazaar a few weeks, and then, to William Langdale's immense joy, returned once more to dear old England.

CHAPTER VII.

DR. NOULAITON IN FRANCE.

WHILST our versatile Doctor was with his friends in Paris, he encountered many scientific *confrères*, some of whom had been led away by the new philosophies of the age to disbelieve everything. Amongst themselves they laughed till they cried again at what they were pleased to call the "childish" ideas of God and Christ, and a future life, and demonstrated (to one another) with irrefutable arguments that "everything" came from "nothing" by its own inherent energy, and would return to nothing in a very satisfactory circle. To the exclusively

scientific intellect there is a great fascination in such recondite reasonings; moreover, the startling novelty and reckless audacity of such speculations gives them a charm to eager and inquisitive minds far beyond their intrinsic worth. Dr. Noulaiton had held his faith lightly, almost unconsciously, and was therefore quite ready to fling it to the winds at the first onset of doubt. For a time he quite exulted in this novel theory of things; studied the new tenets of this new school, with all the eagerness and devotion of a neophyte, and got himself steeped in it to the lips. Upon his return to England, he was filled to overflowing with this queer "gospel" of "atomic generation," and preached it enthusiastically to Pierce, Gilbert, and even Sir Geoffrey. But where he had hoped to make easy converts, he found staunch opponents, who despite all his brilliant subtlety

of argument, held their own with fair success. When the first excitement of what had seemed to him a marvellous discovery, began to cool, he was surprised to find that this splendid discovery of "Nothing;" this happy and cheerful conviction of annihilation at death, was slowly undermining his natural happiness and cheerfulness. Still the chain of reasoning was so complete, so logical, so strong, so "superb," that he felt powerless to break it. Having recklessly shattered all his hopes of a future life, the present one assumed a singular gloom, and by a seeming paradox became at once intensely precious, and contemptibly worthless. Precious, because its last few ebbing years were to be his "all" of life, and worthless because emptied of motive, and unlighted by hope. With a chivalric courage he strove to content himself with the motive of adding to the general

progress of the human race, and with the hope of being gratefully remembered after death; but he found these were flabby wings to fly with—broken springs of action. He still laughed, jested, feasted, studied, worked, but there was no Soul left for any of these doings, it had died before its Body.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE long-planned visit to Wolfern Chace had been so often deferred by the various doings related in the previous chapters that now it was found, to the great disappointment of Caroline, Mildred, and Pierce that it could not be carried out. The house had been let to some family for the season and could not, therefore, be visited.

To lessen this disappointment as much as possible, Lady Langdale planned a picnic to an old hunting lodge in the forest (not very far from their old home) and on the return of the travellers from the Continent, the William Langdales and Dr. Noulaiton were invited over to Ivy Cottage the night

before, so as to start betimes on the following morning. A dainty little lunch had been prepared by the girls; the capacious barouche carried the seniors and the hampers; Caroline and Mildred, Fallington, Pierce and Gilbert rode; whilst to the latter's mingled pain and pleasure Mary and Mrs. Helmore also joined the cavalcade, in the grand yellow chariot, with its immaculate postilion and sleek bays.

The party started early after breakfast, the carriages, of course, keeping the high road which, in those days, was enlivened by many handsome equipages of various kinds, admirably horsed, carrying the old-fashioned City men in to business.

The young people struck off down a grassy lane on to the broad marshes of the Lea and enjoyed a steady, well-in-hand gallop across the two-mile stretch of turf into another

green lane that led up through quaint old Walthamstow and out into the Forest.

Those who have been accustomed to horseback from childhood, and have then for a long time been debarred from that exhilarating exercise, can well understand the pleasurable excitement of a thorough country ride over the springy turf; and when our companions are just those of all the world that we like best, the heightened colour, the sparkling eyes, and the joyous little laughs of our two dear girls can be fully realised.

The rendezvous was reached first by the girls and their cavaliers. After the horses were seen to by the latter, they all strolled away into the forest glades to while away the time.

No; not all. Mr. Gilbert evinced immense solicitude as to their steeds until the yellow chariot drove up, and he had the pleasure of handing out the ladies, with the younger of

whom he then disinterestedly offered to go in search of the others. This search lasted an unconscionably long time, and "the others" had found their way back to the trysting-place fully half an hour before the seekers made their reappearance.

William Langdale had sounded his bugle-call till he was nearly black in the face, for the truants, and Mrs. Helmore was beginning to be seriously uneasy at their absence, when they slowly emerged from an unexpected footpath, looking splendidly unconscious of the lapse of time, and of the solicitude which their absence had caused. Mary could not quite conquer the feminine weakness of a blush when mercilessly rallied by William Langdale; but Gilbert's self-possession was perfect, and he adroitly turned the conversation by inventing an adventure which, if "*non vero*," was, at least, "*ben trovato*."

Meantime, the hampers had been unpacked,

a charming spot selected, and the snowy damask spread on the turf beneath a broad branching oak; the carriage cushions had been arranged for the seniors to sit upon, whilst, for the young people,—proof against cramps and rheumatism by the magic power of love,—the green carpet, woven in Nature's loom, and dyed by the sun's rays, was an all-sufficient and delightful lounge, especially as, for once, the law of natural selection was not interfered with by the Demons of Etiquette and Ceremony.

What a hopeful augury for the world's future denizens that "law of selection" would be if it had its full and fair scope. If "none but the brave" got, as well as "deserved, the fair;" if the strength, energy and vigour of perfect manliness sought and found noble alliance with beauty, purity and bright intelligence in woman a few generations would suffice to abolish from all grades of

society the horrid caricatures of humanity that now make both night and day hideous. But whilst our lovely, but mercenary Hebes shamelessly "throw over" their Sir Lancelot or Sir Galahad for old Lord Silenus Mammon, with a bulbous nose, a gorilla mouth, pig's eyes and projecting ears, and whilst Sir Lancelot and Sir Galahad console themselves, as best they can, with decrepit Lady Bullion—all paint and diamonds—and Mrs. Banker All-Cash, with a horrible squint and a hump-back, the average results of such unholy marriages must continue to deface God's image both in mind and body.

Charming matches, truly! but hardly made *in*—and, perhaps, scarcely sanctioned *by* Heaven—being, on the contrary, strongly suggestive of Lucifer, and of that penultimate brimstone which no amount of treacle will serve to sweeten.

However, no hideous incongruity of that

kind loomed, like a coming darkness, in the future of any of the young people there and then assembled. Even Gilbert had the melancholy satisfaction of believing that his lady-love was not to be sold to a Golden-Distortion. Since that morning's ramble in the forest the glimmer of a delightful doubt as to the reality of this ever-invisible rival had cheered his heart with a revived hope. Mrs. Helmore was charmingly kind and gracious in her manner to him during this memorable lunch, and Mary's eyes ventured once or twice to meet his with a glance which he had the audacity to think meant rather more than utter indifference.

Thanks to Mrs. William Langdale's aid and advice, the cold collation was as perfect as if it had been served at a crack club. Ices, fruits, champagne, Burgundy for the young people; carefully decanted port for the two brothers, and Mrs. Langdale's special

sherry for the elder ladies. Each wine was cooled to its own particular point by the ever-vigilant Perkins; not even the traditional salt or corkscrew was absent, hence no one's tastes were outraged or neglected, no one's digestion deranged, and no one's temper thereby endangered; but all were ready, after this pleasant refection, to enjoy to the utmost the rich feast of sylvan loveliness that opened itself in a series of delightful pictures around them.

Sloping down from where they sat or reclined was a forest-picture of wide-branching pollarded oaks; now gathered into grand groups, anon, opening up into distant glades, through which came softly along a sweet fresh breeze, with its southern warmth deliciously tempered by the invigorating east. As these twin zephyrs veered lazily about from south to east and back again, they brought alternate

perfumes from the hay-fields, the hedge-flowers and the woods; far away in the fields on the right the warm-scented hay with its delicate neutral-green tint, was being loaded-up into the old-world wagons, and the quaint Saxon "woa!" "gea!" of the wagoners (whatever that wonderful command may mean), came borne upon the wind at quite rhythmic intervals. Now and then a shout of laughter from the haymakers, deprived by distance of its too probable coarseness, gave pleasant intimation that they also were enjoying life in their own way; and there was a merry hum from the bees in the air telling that they, too, were singing as they worked, and not merely gathering their honey in sullen and ungrateful silence. The birds were mostly silent, but every one knew that they had had their joyous morning concert and would sing their evensongs of rich-toned delight; whilst the lark not content

with these matins and vespers only, carried up his carol as high as the poor little wings would carry him to tell the heavens how pleasant life was on earth. This was Mr. Pierce's interpretation of the matter, whisperingly confided to Caroline; at which that young lady smiled, but replied with a pretence of matter-of-factness which she occasionally assumed—

"Do you envy the bird, Mr. Falconer?"

"No, indeed, and am not likely to do so, until you are in heaven."

"Thank you! I am contented at present with this less exalted position."

"And I, more than contented; to me such a companion, and such a fair surrounding seems indeed a full foretaste of the future joys; and my dull imagination fails to conceive anything more perfect."

"Of course not, flatterer! but, a truce to compliment; tell me if you have not always

noticed that our enjoyment of scenery depends immensely upon the mood in which we look at it? We have often and often, when at the Chace, driven over to this spot on just such afternoons as this, and yet it never seemed so intensely enjoyable as now."

"I understand perfectly that feeling. There are times in one's life of rare and indescribable powers of enjoyment, sudden upliftings of the soul into an exultant happiness, as though the mortal veil through which we commonly regard Nature had been removed; or as if a new, delicate, and intense vision had been given us by which even the prosaic things of earth were idealized into an unearthly beauty. The forms of trees, the myriad quivering leaves, the mossy turf, the tinkle of a sheep bell, the merry laugh of a young girl, a strain of music, or the plash of waters. See now! is not the gleam of sunshine on that giant tree-trunk

splendid, and how the rays sparkle on the leaves and dance in flecks of brilliant light on the greensward. Yes, the old forest has in sober truth turned into fairyland!"

Now, despite Mr. Pierce's enthusiastic asseverations about the forest, a keen observer might have remarked that he, at this point of their chat, was looking rather at the reflection of fairyland in Caroline's eyes than at the veritable fairyland itself. Ah, well! perhaps it was only in that reflection that Pierce's fairyland existed.

Meantime Gilbert was trying to amuse Mary Grahame by conjuring up old stories of the stately Maiden Queen, whose wont it was to come a hunting with her lords and ladies and a gallant train through the woods of Kingsland and Shacklewell, across the valley of the Lea, and past the little hamlet of Walthamstow, into the dense depths of the then dense forest of Waltham. For this was

the spot where she had built herself a plain but capacious hunting lodge, with a staircase broad enough for a palfrey to bear her up to the state chamber at the top of the building.

"Proud, stern and cruel as she was," said Gilbert, "she was a grand Queen, and had intellectual giants for her Court and her subjects. I would give half my term of life now to have lived the other half with such men as Raleigh and Shakspeare!"

"And to have had that half lessened into a quarter, like Raleigh's?" said Mary, demurely.

"Well, no, that did not enter into my calculation, but was it not a splendid age, Miss Grahame? Can you not almost picture a gallant hunting calvalcade coming galloping up the slope through that lovely glade, with merry horn and bounding horses, and the spreading pack giving tongue to that savage music that sportsmen love—"

"And that I detest," said Mary warmly. "There seems to me nothing so utterly cowardly and cruel as to set a great swarm of ramping, savage dogs after one poor little panting hare."

"Although the hare proverbially has not 'many friends,' he has at least a very warm one in you. I almost envy him, and would even consent to be hunted, if so I might win so much pity; but they hunted the hart chiefly in those days; have you not any pity for a hunted hart also?"

"If you will not be shocked by a poor pun, I would say that I pity that also, most *heartily;* but then it has longer legs, and a better chance of escape."

"Not much chance of escape when haunted, as well as hunted by a pair of bright eyes," said Gilbert.

Mary's dropped instantly, and she ventured to say no more about either heart or hounds.

"How delightfully languid this air seems to make one," said Fallington to Mildred.

"I perceive it does," retorted the lady.

"But I didn't exactly mean that," explained he. "I meant that it was so refreshing that one could enjoy the repose without feeling enervated."

"I think I see hazily what you wish to tell me, and, if so, I agree with you; there is a kind of languor that is intensely miserable; a dull incapacity alike of action and enjoyment; a species of living death. But there is another kind of pleasant rest, in which one has the full consciousness both of the rest and its pleasantness."

"Just so. You know what I mean a great deal better than I do myself. I felt just this kind of conscious luxury of repose when I had nearly recovered from my wounds. It was a day like this, and Pierce had wheeled my

couch to the open window, and propped me up as carefully as the kindest of women-nurses could have done; then, after placing iced-sherbet and fruits within my reach, had gone to his regimental duties. Jolly good fellow, Pierce; saved my life, you know."

"Yes; Mr. Falconer really ought to have a medal from the Royal Humane Society."

"Well, but what was I saying? Oh, I know; sitting at the window. Ah, how fresh and bright all the homely flowers of the little cottage garden looked to me, and how exquisitely smooth and glistening the breadths of sand; and how brilliant and full of hope and gladness the great sea, dotted with the white sails of the pleasure yachts. My aching pains and maddening irritations had ceased, and in that lull I felt a soft stream of lazy gladness pouring into my poor little bedroom, and literally steeping me to the lips

in a delicious waking dream—and—may I tell you, dear Mildred, who was the angel of that dream?"

"I have not the slightest curiosity as to this," said Mildred, with a slight tint of pink on her cheek; but all the same she did not interrupt him nor look very angry whilst that confession was being made for, perhaps, the fiftieth time within the last fortnight.

"Dear Lady Langdale," said Mrs. William, *sotto voce*, "I do so congratulate you on what our sporting friends would call the 'Double Event.'"

"What do you mean, dear?" replied the lady demurely.

"Oh, it's quite obvious to the meanest capacity, is it not, Mrs. Helmore? that those two dear girls have paired off to-day, just as they ought to do, for life."

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Helmore, "and if my experience goes for any-

thing, they have decided between themselves that it is to be so."

"Well, I may as well confess," said Lady Langdale, "that I, personally, should be well content; and I suppose they imagine that a tacit consent has been given. But Sir Geoffrey considers it best to postpone any absolute decision; because, of course, as you know, their respective cavaliers are neither of them in a position to maintain a wife, and, unfortunately, with scanty expectation of any change for the better."

"My dear," said Mrs. William, "men are always stupidly slow in such matters; they pretend to be so prudent and far-seeing. Far-seeing? fiddlesticks! I say. When I have once set my heart upon a thing, I like to have it done at once, without any shilly-shallying, or pro's and con's."

"A very good plan in small matters, my

dear," said Mrs. Helmore, "but where young ladies are concerned, I think a little 'waiting' is desirable. My opinion is that if a girl is worth anything at all, she is worth a good deal of waiting for."

"I don't quite agree with either of you; I should object excessively to my girls making hasty marriages, but, on the other hand, I think very long engagements exceedingly trying."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. William, "let us three women set our wits to work to make the 'long' shorter, at all events. William shall, *sub rosa*, purchase the next step in the army for Pierce, and I can manage so as to make it seem to come from some one else; whilst Mrs. Helmore has, I know, a powerful friend at Court, who can do a good turn for Mr. Fallington; and, as to the dear girls, you know, love, I have no children of my own" (here the dear lady's voice quivered

just a little, and a tear started unbidden) "and all that I have shall go to yours."

Here the two ladies kissed one another, and indulged in a delicious "little cry" for a few moments, whilst Mrs. Helmore looked on with a kindly approving smile, and pressed both their hands with a fervent "God bless you both."

"Capital crop of hay that yonder, Geoff," said William Langdale; "bring down the price next season, if it's all like that."

"Yes, it seems a fair crop, and well saved. What a droll thing it seems that such a commonplace thing as 'making hay' may really almost aspire to the dignity of a Fine Art."

"Pooh," replied the other, "'tis only to cut it down, and pitch it about in the sunshine till it's dry, and then bundle it to the stack, as those fellows are doing, and it's all right."

"Is it old boy? You try some day; and

you won't find it quite such plain-sailing as you think. I made an awful fool of myself, when first I took to gentleman-farming, and never had a truss of hay fit for my horses to eat until I resigned my hay-fields wholly to the management of an old fellow, who could neither read nor write, nor give the slightest reason for anything he did; and I've never had bad hay since."

"Ah, you were too scientific, Sir Geoffrey," said Dr. Noulaiton; "whilst you were analyzing and theorizing, your hay was spoiling."

"Precisely so—none know better than you men of science, that what can be done in the laboratory, often fails in the field, and that it is chiefly by the aid of 'rule of thumb' that science is applied to practice."

"I have found that to my cost," confessed Dr. Noulaiton, laughing at the recollection of his own blunders and failures. "There is a

provoking *non sequiter* about science, when one first attempts to apply it to practice, that often makes those first attempts ridiculous *fiascos*."

"Should not that make us a little less confident as to those subtle and highly compplicated deductions of science, by which some amongst us are unsettling their own and other's faith in higher things."

"If by 'higher' things you mean religious beliefs, I cross swords with you at once. 'Reason' must ever be man's highest, noblest, and, indeed, only guide."

"If Reason were absolutely infallible; never subject to errors and fallacies, even then I would not admit your assertion that she is the *only* guide."

"Ah, you want to cross swords with me again in defence of your religion."

"I want you to reconsider carefully the grounds of your Scepticism."

"You have been forestalled, my dear Sir Geoffrey, by your son Gilbert. Listen—a few nights ago he and I sat up till the 'small hours' discussing, earnestly this very question. Not from the 'Scriptural-evidence' point of view, but from the philosophic argument as to the future life. Of course, we left off, each more convinced than ever of the truth of his own logic."

"Of course that is the general result of all argument."

"But," resumed Dr. Noulaiton, "strangely enough, through the few remaining hours of darkness, I could not rest. My thoughts seemed to run away with me, carrying me from theme to theme with such a mad rapidity that my whole brain seemed on fire with the whirl; the minutes seemed hours, and the hours months, whilst this wild Walpurgis dance went on and then suddenly came an exhausted calm; a mind-paralysis, a

sense of blank nothingness, a conscious death. How long I lay in this state, I know not, but it was very terrible, and had so deep an effect upon me that I could not help saying to Geoffrey at breakfast—'Well! *mon ami!* I was very nearly finding out which of us was right;' and I then described to him the sensation of living-death which I had passed through; a few days after Mr. Gilbert 'improved the occasion,' as your parsons say, by hurling at my devoted head this terrific appeal."

Whereupon Dr. Noulaiton pulled from his pocket a rhythmic letter, having the simple heading of—

"SHALL WE LIVE AGAIN?"

"Read it out, Geoff," said William Langdale, "I shall like to hear what the boy can say on the subject."

Sir Geoffrey glanced hastily through it, and then read as follows :—

"When thy life trembled on the awful poise,
And hung suspended o'er death's fearful chasm;
When all the sum of earthly woes and joys
Seemed blotted out for aye, in one sharp spasm;
When blank annihilation's horrent cloud
Swooped like a vast and fearsome bird of prey,
Stifling thy soul beneath its clinging shroud,
And turned to blackness the sweet light of day;
Oh! true and noble-hearted as thou art,
Bravely chivalric, even to a fault,
Could'st thou gaze downward with unwavering heart
Into that fathomless, Eternal vault?

"Oh! did'st thou not in that forewarning hour,
Crave one last glance into the Father's eyes?
One last conviction of the Father's power,
One glance prophetic up to Heaven's skies?
I know that thy denial of belief
In any life for man beyond the tomb
Dulls every pleasure, sharpens every grief,
Enshrouds Death in impenetrable gloom—
Wherefore, dear friend, why should'st thou put this strain
On mortal powers in their last extreme?
Take up Man's nobler destiny again!—
Awake! arise! from out thy troubled dream.

"Because some subtle microscopic mind,
Peering and prying into Nature's 'tittles,'
Hath made itself to broader light stone blind,
And lost the 'large' in infinitely 'littles,'

Because ' Development's, the last new craze,
And men, with ingenuity perverse,
Abolish Heaven by a witty phrase,
And sacrifice the better for the worse,
Must we, like abject slaves to Reason's rod,
Lay down our lives 'neath Syllogistic wheel ?
Are we indeed deserted by our God ?
Does He no longer higher powers reveal ?
What does it matter, though a Pedant proves,
To his own infinite self satisfaction,
That all creation runs in settled grooves
Derived at outset from the merest fraction.
If from a tadpole Newton came at last,
And Shakspeare owed his genius to an ape,
E'en from these dubious marvels of the past
A still more glorious future we may shape.

"If from a senseless, microscopic thing.
Revolving aimlessly in water-drop,
The high-souled, almost god-like Man could spring,
Why need such vast transitions ever stop ?
Thou say'st ' transitions ' but affect the race
And not the merely individual man ;
They may do both ; some changes we can trace
That forecast vividly this broader plan.
Is it less credible, in fair degree,
That man into an angel's form should change,
And from all gross environments set free,
Through other scenes of being freely range,
Than, that the caterpillar, crawling slow,
Should lose its form and also seem to die,
Then reappear in Summer sunshine's glow
A brilliant, joyous, broad-winged butterfly ?

Here it is not the 'race' alone perfected
By hecatombs of individuals dying,
The earth-born thing itself is not rejected
But 'changed' into a creature, soaring, flying.
'This is mere symbol.' True, but quite as fair
As this new Genesis from frogs and apes.
But let us leave our Psyche in the air
And 'think the problem out' in other shapes.

"Those who believe in One from death ascended
Need no mere 'symbols,' no mere insect law,
All dread of drowning in death's sea is ended,
But sinking men should 'catch at every straw.'
All argument without that revelation
Can reach no higher than a fair assumption;
To attempt to *prove* man's future destination
Would be a most ridiculous presumption.
If Heaven were clearly, absolutely, certain
Demonstrable by simple Rule of Three,
Man would have virtually raised death's curtain
And man 'qua man' would simply cease to be.
For who, when sure of Life and joys Eternal
Would fling away so glorious a prize,
And doom himself for aye to pangs infernal,
Or plunge in gulfs of fire with open eyes?

"Man is a complex being, not 'all Reason,'
But with some other noble powers endowed,
And these may fairly claim, without high treason,
That their due influences should be allowed.
For, like the rays of light, Faith, Hope, and Love,
Imagination, Reason, all must blend
To form the white beam shed down from above,
And each must still be blended to the end

To form the perfect man. "If Reason rules
With such harsh tyranny, that all the rest
Are crushed beneath the logic of the schools,
Man is a "reasoning animal" at best.
Why with deep Faith was all mankind endowed
If Reason were to prove it worse than nought ;
Its use denied, its promptings disallowed,
Its influence dreaded, its beliefs untaught ?
And why, with soaring pinions, was Hope given
To lift us far above this lower sphere,
And as Earth darkens to reveal a Heaven,
If Reason were to slay Hope with a sneer?
And Love, that hath no sequel on this Earth—
Love that gives impulse to our noblest deeds,
Must it, too, perish in its earliest birth
Whilst Reason 'reasons' as its victim bleeds ?

"And bright Imagination's fairy wing
Far-piercing eye and fine attunëd ear,
Rising to gaze on Angels as they sing
And listening to the melodies they hear,
Must it be caged and blinded ; merely fed
And kept alive with grudged contemptuous dole
On dry, distasteful Reason's daily bread
A wretched Body parted from its Soul ?

"Thou says't that man fulfils his purpose here,
Is born and grows, thinks, acts, and then decays,
That generations rise and disappear
Merely to help the world to better days,
Thou says't that it is nobler far to act
Fearing no devil, yearning for no God,
Believing nought but scientific fact,
Content, like dead leaves, to manure the sod.

"But is it so—is man so mocked and cursed?
Hast thou not felt that centuries of being,
Would fail to satisfy thy quenchless thirst
For higher knowledge, and for clearer seeing?
Hast thou not yearned for sympathies intense
Intuitive and swift, full deep, complete
Far, far transcending mortal speech or sense
Such as can only flash when angels meet?

"Hast thou not had supernal moments when
The earthly veil was lifted from thine eyes,
And things invisible to other men
Thrilled through thy inmost heart with glad suprise?
In such high moments, like a lightning flash,
The Sapphire Gates of Heaven open wide,
And though they close again with thund'rous crash,
Yet thou hast seen the joys that there abide.

"And thence upriseth consciousness Divine
Of high capacities and nascent powers,
Needing a higher sphere in which to shine
Than Earth can give, e'en in its brightest hours.
And when bewildered by the stinging worries
That buzz around us with their irritations,
Chafing and fretting us with senseless flurries,
Wasting our time and thought with mean vexations,
Do we not crave a coming Life of Peace
Where all our nobler pow'rs will reign supreme,
Where all distracting wants and cares will cease
And Thought flow onward in one glorious stream?

"Has man seen all of Earth that Earth can show?
The very question brings its own negation;
Our highest knowledge is to know we know
Nothing of this, our first small habitation.

The greatest traveller of all our race,
Who spends his life in ranging sea and land,
Only a narrow spider's line can trace,
Unconscious of the vastness on each hand;
Whilst of the dim, mysterious, occult forces
Whose mere effects we watch for and employ,
Of their real nature, essence, or first sources,
We know no more than a poor idiot boy;
We give them classic names, and proudly label
One "Electricity," one "Gravitation,"
But what they *are* is any one yet able
To tell us, without doubt, or hesitation?

"If, then, such realms of knowledge yet unknown
Are shown us dimly in our own small world,
What vaster realms in starlit space are shown
Where Suns and Planets on their paths are hurled!
Eternity itself will scarce suffice
For all the possibilities of seeing
And tracing out each marvellous device
By which each sphere maintaineth varied being.

"Thou sayst these are misleading intuitions
Which wiser mortals smile at and pass by
And that 'tis folly to expect fruition
From flowers but born to blossom and to die.
Art thou so sure of this?—Recal the Dead,
The muster-roll of noblest, bravest, best
Who by these 'intuitions' roused and led
Through fiery paths, fulfilled their God's behest;
Have they but died like dogs, by God deceived
Must all their glorious hopes be unfulfilled,
Alike of Earth's and Heaven's joys bereaved
Tortured by man, and by their Maker killed?

Suppose thou wert a God—at thy command
Millions of beings for ten thousand years
Passed, in their generations o'er the land,
Strange lives of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears.

"Woulds't thou have suffered every higher mind
In all those generations as they past
To hold a faith that made them deaf and blind
To all Earth's pleasures thickly round them cast.
A Faith that armed them for the love of thee,
To bear fierce pangs and death's last terrors brave
And then would'st thou have drowned them in thy sea,
Or left them dead for ever in the grave?

"If thou, being only such a thing as "Man"
Would shrink from thus misleading other men;
Canst thou conceive that this is Nature's plan?
"Nature must be a mocking Demon then?

"If in this life there clearly is no scope
For full fruition of high powers within,
If in this life there clearly is no hope
Of crowns for virtue, punishment for sin,
If rampant Selfishness with strength and health
Seizes earth's goods and never finds them cloy,
If shallow Folly revels in large wealth,
If Martyrs burn, whilst Sybarites enjoy;
And if this is the 'end-all' for mankind,
No realm where all life's wrongs are fully righted
Oh, friend! God's justice must indeed be blind
And Faith, Hope, Love for evermore be blighted.

"But, it is not so, it can never be!
'Tis true—it is not possible to prove,
So that half-opened eyes can clearly see
The plains of Heaven spreading out above;

But, where our grandest aspirations tend,
Where all our highest intuitions lead us,
There is our "home," and *that* must be the end,
And to *that home* may all good angels speed us.

"Remember in your doubts this crowning fact
Faith, were 'no' faith, if merged in perfect sight;
If Heaven were *open* we should cease to *act*,
Man would be blinded by excess of light."

"The argument is fairly close," said Sir Geoffrey. "I can see that my boy had his heart in his work."

"And I'm glad to see that his heart's in the right place," said William Langdale.

"I must confess he hits me hard on one or two points, and I had no idea that the rhythmic form could be condensed into such pithy logic."

"It is one of Gilbert's strongest desires to prove its power and value in that very direction; he contends that a deeply thought-out and well-pointed couplet can often convey to the mind as much real truth as whole pages of prose."

"The general opinion of poetry is the exact opposite of this; it has come to be looked upon as an excuse for running riot amongst words—as a 'voice full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.'"

"I hold with Gilbert," said William Langdale, "and that is why I like his style; he doesn't sacrifice reason to rhyme, nor use a hundred words instead of one. I'm so long from school, that I've forgotten what little I knew of Horace and the other 'classics,' but it seems to me that Pope's 'Essay on Man' was a masterpiece of this style."

"I think so, too; and many of his couplets are remembered and quoted by men who neither know nor care who wrote them."

"Pleasant for Pope, and encouraging for the poets generally."

"The poets in their degree, like the prophets and apostles of old, 'are of all men most miserable,' if we are to believe in your

dreary creed of annihilation. But shall you answer Gilbert's letter, Dr. Noulaiton ?"

"Assuredly ; but I shall pay it the compliment of reading it more than once or twice before doing so."

"I think that is but fair ; what has taken one man a great deal of thought and study to write, deserves to be read with thought and study."

"Oh, life is too short for that, except in matters that interest one specially."

"Too short for this ? Yes, too short for anything ! if this life is all ! A mere mockery of 'life.' It is only as we approach its end that we begin to understand its value."

"Ah, that is very much a question of temperament. You English take your pleasures sadly ; for my part, I have enjoyed even my misfortunes, and laughed at my own mistakes and small disasters as heartily as my

best friend could have done. My life has been so happy on earth, that I do not think I can fairly claim another in heaven."

"Claim? My dear Doctor, who could for one moment dream of 'claiming' a future life? After the best and utmost that we can do, surely we all know that 'we are unprofitable servants, and have but done what it was our duty to do;' but to accept, with the intensest gratitude, the hope and promise of so glorious a destiny, is quite a different thing."

* * * * * *

Whilst the elder men had been thus discoursing, the ladies and the younger folk had wandered away in little groups, ever and anon turning to watch from points of vantage the glories of the sunset; for it was one of those miracles of splendour that no artist dare paint, lest he should be accused of gross exaggera-

tion. Rubies, sapphire, gold, and molten silver were flung broadcast over the broad horizon with a lavish profusion, making that sky-world seem indeed the fabled plains of heaven; whilst in the far distance shone seas of ineffable light, studded with Islands of the Blest.

'Twas a scene of such aërial wonder and loveliness, that it seemed to lack nothing to make it absolutely perfect, except the power of seeing groups of angels floating or flying from island to island with the messages of Love and Happiness from the Great Source of All. But even as they gazed, the vision slowly paled and faded, leaving somewhat of a yearning wistfulness within their hearts for "Light, more Light!"

Meantime the tree tops had caught eagerly at the parting rays, and held them lovingly in their million leafy hands, being glorified and transfigured thereby with a brilliance not of

earth; every leaf shone like a sparkling emerald, and seemed radiant with light. Then the long shadows of the trees grew longer and vaguer, like the memories of a passing life, and the sweet refreshing fragrances of the earth came forth with richer, fuller power over the senses, as though to remind them that earth was God's earth still.

A soft and intermittent splash of far-away, silvery bells floated over field and forest in broken music; broken by deeper silence between the chimes, whilst from over the hills on the east came faint snatches of gayer music from the drums and horns of a party of revellers passing on their homeward way after their day of foresting. From the village green came the merry laugh of the young cricketers; from the glades, the tinkle of the sheep bell and the low of the kine; from the hay fields, the quiet swirl and swish of the lush grass as it fell before the scythe; whilst the

tired harvestmen, now silently and somewhat wearily, were finishing their day's work by putting up the remaining hay into huge and deftly-shaped pyramids, that made the fields look like a mountainous Lilliput.

But the glory of the sunset was over, the bells ceased to chime, the revellers had gone on their way rejoicing, the game was over, and the work was done; and the great bright eye of Night came out, and gazed calmly on the quiet earth to see what *had been done* under the sun.

Regretfully, as feeling that such days should never end, the little party began to make arrangements for the homeward journey. The horses were saddled and put to. The indefatigable Perkins had previously cleared and packed away everything with the most perfect order, the girls were lifted into their saddles, and Mrs. William Langdale had just got into the barouche, when Reeve, suddenly

seeing that he had forgotten to put his master's whip in the whip-stock, foolishly left the carriage, and ran back for it. The horses thus suddenly left to themselves, and excited by the presence of so many others, dashed off at a swinging trot, and, feeling no check, broke at once into a full gallop. Pierce and the other men leapt into their saddles, and started in pursuit; but the bays were swift, the slope was in their favour, and the road down which they rushed was so narrow that the horsemen could not, even when they overtook the carriage, get past it to head them back.

Gilbert, knowing every inch of the forest, leapt his horse over a ditch, and rode down another glade, making for a more open place where he thought the carriage must pass.

Meantime Mrs. Langdale motioned to the other horsemen not to follow, as it only excited the runaways; then boldly clambered

on to the box, and leant forward over the dash-board to try and catch the reins. By great coolness and courage, she managed to hook them up with her parasol, and a gleam of hope lighted up the heart of the agonised husband as he saw this. But, alas! this was all in vain; the horses were wild with their gallop, and quite beyond her power to pull in. On, on they dashed in their terrible speed, and her woman's strength failed more and more at every stride they made; still she neither fainted, nor screamed, nor threw up the reins in despair, but sat firmly, and tugged womanfully, although with the full and terrible consciousness that she could no more stop them than she could have stopped a brace of cannon balls. Still she managed to keep some sort of guidance over them, and steered them fairly between the trees, until Gilbert, having gained the open space ahead of them, leapt from his horse, and madly

tried to seize them as they thundered along. He was hurled to one side in an instant, and fell backward, bruised and stunned, whilst the mad brutes swerved away to the other side, and crashed the carriage against a tree. The poor lady was flung forward with terrific force; an awful crash of broken iron and splintered wood and glass drowned her last moan; and when the others hurried up with beating hearts and agonised fears, she lay pale and calm as the moonlight itself on the greensward, quite dead!

Ah, who can fathom the depth of despair, who can conceive the blackness of darkness that lies within the compass of those two common words, "Quite Dead?" That very customary and yet needless word "quite" seems, with its "damnable iteration," to add another pang to the utter hopelessness of "Dead."

"Quite Dead! No, no, no, it cannot!

it must not! it shall not be! See—see—she breathes. Surely she stirred. Her hand is not cold. Ah! Heaven! Oh, God!! Save her!!!"

Alas, no breath, no movement, and the poor little white hand grows colder and colder, till it chills him to the very marrow. With a groan, it is dropped from the loving grasp, and the strong man bends down, in his deep agony, and weeps like a stricken child.

"Quite dead!" Aye. Close the shutters, and draw down the thickest curtain, for the Light of the Home is gone—is gone—gone into darkness.

"Quite dead!" Yea, dead? And what is Death? Is it annihilation? Must these two loving hearts, thus parted in such agony on earth, meet no more in heaven? Is there no realm where all earth's sorrows shall be soothed with joys; all earth's deadly wrongs be righted; all earth's dreadful

wounds be healed? Has all that genial love, all that tender and child-like faith, all that brilliant imagination, all that glorious hope, which lighted up the soul of the departed, gone—and for ever? extinguished by a mere accident, crushed by a sudden blow? Ah! why, then, was that soul endowed with such lavish and noble powers as these?

The evening darkened rapidly, but darker fell the shadows of death on the saddened group. Such an ending to such a day, was too terrible; and, for a time, they stood about aimlessly, absently; unconscious of everything but the dull, leaden presence of overwhelming grief.

Gilbert had recovered from the stunning blow of his fall, and hurried up with the rest to this scene of death. The second shock was far worse than the first; he could not recognise it as a reality, but felt certain that it must be merely a fearful dream from

which he should soon awake. The voices and the low sobs around him seemed far away and muffled, as if they came faintly from a ghostly land. The features of his friends grew blurred and indistinct, and slowly faded, until he was conscious only of a vision of mournful eyes; and, then, he fell heavily to the ground in a far-deeper swoon than before. Mary Grahame uttered a stifled cry ; and Lady Langdale flung herself on her knees by the side of her loved boy, chafing his hands, and raising his head. The others hurried towards her with restoratives and aid, and the spell of apathy was thus broken. Under Dr. Noulaiton's direction, the proper measures were taken for Gilbert's recovery ; and Pierce mounted his horse to ride on to Walthamstow to seek some conveyance in lieu of the destroyed carriage.

Meantime, the two brothers lifted a sad burden tenderly and reverently into Mrs.

Helmore's chariot, and that dear, kind lady placed herself so as to support the drooping form. Mary, also, got into the carriage, although with a natural, shrinking awe at the presence of the dead; and with a wistful longing to be assured of Gilbert's recovery before commencing their dreadful homeward journey. But Mrs. Helmore was anxious to get away, knowing that it would be long past midnight before they could arrive in the city.

On the way they met Pierce returning with a wretched old wagonette, drawn by a still more miserable horse; the only thing he could obtain in the shape of a vehicle; into this, however, Lady Langdale, William Langdale, Dr. Noulaiton, and Gilbert were fain to get, as soon as the latter was sufficiently revived. Pierce insisted on Sir Geoffrey's taking his horse, so as to ride home with his daughters and Fallington; whilst he himself walked, keeping easily up with the poor

weary horse in the wagonette. The equestrians rode on a little in advance, but still so as to be within hail in case of need; and so, with slow funereal pace, they returned homeward, with the long, dark shadow falling on their path.

How much, indeed, may a day bring forth! With hearts full of life, hope, and gladness they had gone out into the freshness of the morning, with well-appointed carriage and powerful horses, whose vigour and speed gave that sense of exhilaration which adds so much to the mere animal enjoyment of rapid movement; everything had conduced to make their little holiday so charming and delightful; and now, with hearts bowed down by a deadly grief, they were being jolted back in a miserable hack carriage, with a poor tired brute to draw them; so weak, indeed, that nothing but incessant "whip" could urge it along.

The two elder men got out and walked up every slope, and Dr. Noulaiton insisted on the sullen driver doing the same; Gilbert tried, but, to his mortification, was compelled to sit in, and be dragged painfully along. To add to their misery, black clouds came rolling slowly up from over London, and, at about half-distance from Homerton, obscured the moon, and seemed to shut them in beneath a lurid, dark dome of stagnant suffocating air.

Arrived at the Cottage, Sir Geoffrey and the girls put up their horses at Bristow's, whilst poor Fallington rode disconsolately on alone to London. When the wagonette arrived, both man and horse refused to go further; so, depositing Lady Langdale and Gilbert, William Langdale and Dr. Noulaiton walked on until they chanced upon an old hackney-coach, which had just brought home some late revellers out of London.

This broken-up journey, with its torturing

slowness, seemed to William Langdale to occupy years; and, perhaps, in very truth, the years of his life did, indeed, ebb from him in those few dreadful hours. He walked on mechanically and feebly, scarcely speaking a word, and in his dream it seemed to himself very childish and foolish, but he could not help feeling a strong repulsion from his companion Dr. Noulaiton, for his avowed disbelief in a future life. The knowledge that any man really held such a dread creed, added another bitter drop to the cup of misery which he was draining to the dregs. Of course, neither of them spoke on such a subject at such a time; for each felt it would be too painful to be endured; possibly, if Dr. Noulaiton had confessed that even this blackness had enabled him to see a faint streak of light on the far, very far-away horizon, it might have given his friend a slight sense of relief; but

the light was, as yet, but faint, and the word was left unsaid. Instinctively aware that his further companionship was not desired, Dr. Noulaiton took leave of his friend at the door, and when William Langdale entered his once dear old home the full rush of misery came surging in upon him like black waves; and, once again, he bent his head upon his fevered hands, and the scalding tears rained down. All the memories of the house, and its dear mistress, came back upon him as he sat. All the cheerful days and bright evenings they had spent together; all her kindness of heart; all her brilliancy of wit; all her refinement, skill, and tact; all her charming little womanly ways, and pretty coquetries rose up vividly in his aching memory, whilst a mocking, taunting voice seemed to croak out an incessant refrain of—

"All gone, and for ever!
All gone, and for ever!"

Once in the folly of his grief he started up and shouted in defiance of this voice—

"Liar! she is not—she cannot be dead—she shall not die!"

Alas, poor impotent humanity! not all his wealth, that he would have flung away instantly to save her; not his life, that he would have gladly given for hers, could avail; the clock struck, it sounded like the death-knell of hope, and brought back the awful heart-chilling refrain—

"All gone, and for ever!
All gone, and for ever!"

Then his thoughts wandered back, and dwelt on all the events of the day with an intense minuteness; recalling every word, every movement, every look, every smile of his beloved. Then he saw again the mad horses plunging away, saw her lithe and graceful form, first gathering up the

reins, and then sitting firm and full of strength and courage to the last,—saw the fatal swerve, heard the dreadful crash, and gazed once more on the lifeless form and sweet calm face beneath the moon. Then with an irresistible yearning, and yet, a vague shudder, he longed, once more, to look on that face. Nerving himself, as best he could, he staggered upstairs to her room, and opened the door, very slowly, stepped softly up to the bedside, and found himself alone with the silent dead.

Another wild paroxysm of grief broke him down as he touched the cold hand, and kissed the unanswering lips, and, flinging himself on his knees, he lost all consciousness of time until a few straggling rays of sunshine came gaily through the curtains, making the candles burn dimly red and yellow, whilst the gradually increasing roar of the outer world of London broke

his nightmare into fragments. Then he arose and went away, stealthily and on tip-toe, feeling like a coward and a criminal for not daring to look at her again.

When he stood vacantly gazing in the toilet glass in his dressing-room, he was only half conscious that he was looking at the reflection of himself. So wan, so spiritless and haggard, with a strange rough growth of beard and unkempt tangled hair, eyes dulled and blood-shot, with reddened lids over which the great shaggy eyebrows were pent and lowering, a visage marred and blurred by bitter grief; such was the altered countenance that gazed back sorrowfully at him as he stood. Mechanically and listlessly he made a slow and careless toilet; mechanically and listlessly he descended to the breakfast-room, and ate something that tasted like sawdust, and drank something that tasted like gall; mechanically and listlessly he went to his counting house,

opened his letters, and bade his clerks answer them as they liked.

Later on in the day, by the mere force of habit, he found himself "on 'Change," speaking things and straightway forgetting what he had said; hearing men as if their voices were muffled, or afar off. The condolences that met him at every turn, although uttered with much real heartiness, simply conveyed *no* meaning to his soul; they barely touched the circumference of his sorrow; not entering for one moment to its centre. Then, when the hours of Change were over, and he turned to go home, he checked himself, with a start and a moan, saying bitterly in muttered tones—

"Home! what is home? where is home? I have henceforth no home!"

Wandering irresolutely in any direction, (he neither knew nor cared where,) he saw old Bristow on the Homerton coach, just about

to start, and getting up on the hind seat so as to avoid the loquacity of the old coachman, was put down at his brother's cottage. There the tender and delicately skilful sympathy of Lady Langdale, and the quiet gentle affection of his two nieces, soothed in some slight degree the first hard rancours of his grief; whilst a long and earnest talk with Sir Geoffrey far on into the night was rounded by a deep sleep like that of a tired child, who has wept himself weary. From this he awoke next morning much refreshed, and, in some slight measure, resigned.

Let us pass over the "pageantry of woe" which is the last, dread scene of our mortal life.

Of course the Ghouls who batten on such sorrows found an easy prey in William Langdale, and frivolous pomp, hollow ceremony, and sham mourners presented their hateful mockeries to his overwhelming distress. But

when the beautiful and solemn service for the burial of the dead was read by good old Dr. Maxwell, in a voice that thrilled with suppressed emotion, it sounded like a grand undertone of undying faith and hope that was inexpressibly soothing to the stricken hearts of the mourners. It touched, also, on that day, a hitherto silent chord in a heart until now afar off from such influences, for Dr. Noulaiton, who was present, at the request of Gilbert, was struck with its noble simplicity and tender earnestness, and the streak of light on the dark horizon became less faint and uncertain.

Sir Geoffrey insisted on taking his brother back to the Cottage, although the latter would fain have stayed brooding over his sorrows, in his own deserted house. Once there, womanly persuasion induced him to stay. The Thames villa was of course given up, none of them could have borne to

go back to a scene from which the light had faded. Mrs. Helmore redoubled her kind attentions, aiding Lady Langdale and the girls to devise such quiet cheer and distraction of mind as was possible. But not much was possible; he accepted all their kind attempts patiently and with a grateful heart; but, all the same, the grateful heart was broken; and his thanks made but a poor broken music, very pitiful to hear. He would try to smile, even to remember, painfully, some little jest wherewith to disguise his sorrow from them; but, alas, the smile was but as sickly sunshine; and the jest more terrible than a sob.

The great burly figure (so well known in the City) shrank and shrank into a vast framework, gaunt and angular; and his clothes hung upon him loosely, miserably. The broad full visage, erst blithe and genial as a Momus, became hollow-cheeked and

pallid ; the mouth drooped, the brows were pent and contracted, and every outline of the face sharpened and defined. Food became more and more impossible to eat, the old vintage ports were utterly distasteful, and he could barely be prevailed on to drink even a single glass, for it tasted to his fevered palate like liquid fire.

With a terrible anxiety they watched these fatal symptoms; and, although feeling hopeless of the power of medical aid to "minister to a mind diseased," the first physicians of the day were called in. They had nothing to advise but "change of scene," and to this he obstinately demurred. Soon, indeed, he was too weak to attempt it, and then they knew that the end was near, and that the days were coming when they should see his face no more.

But he, even as the body shrank, and the strength withered, seemed to be happily

more and more conscious of the passing in of light to his soul, and a gradually increasing serenity soothed him with an influence from above; calmer, more patient, clearer and kinder in thought of, and care for others, the approach of death was thus robbed of half its terrors. His was not the faith of the subtle logician, deducing "God," as the ultimate product of a long chain of painful argument; nor that of the scientist peeping and prying after Him as though He were a something to be discovered by the microscope or the telescope; but from his youth upward he had believed that God "was and is, and is to come," and now that he was about to pass into His presence, he knew it. Once for all, when youth had deepened into manhood, he had confirmed himself in that noble and happy faith, by a full and earnest study of the sublime self-sacrifice of Christ, and of the calm unwavering courage, faith and

wisdom of His disciples. Thenceforth, like Paul, he had suffered no man to trouble him with "vain disputations," nor "oppositions of learning falsely so called." He had placed his hand in God's, only desiring to be led whithersoever He willed; he had striven to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before Him. Possibly this may seem very foolish; but possibly, also, the foolishness of God may be wiser than the wisdom of man. It was repugnant to his nature to make any parade or profession of religion, and even now, when it was the sole thought and hope of his few remaining days, he could hardly be got to say much about it; he liked a little talk with Gilbert, now and then, upon the subject of Dr. Noulaton's scepticism, and urged him earnestly to use his best powers in defence of the faith; but he preferred to read his Bible to himself, and at such times to be left alone. He was very thankful at

other times, if Lady Langdale or the girls would read to him from old George Herbert, or a good plain sermon by Blair or Tillotson; but he was too shy and reticent by nature to say anything to them of his own religious state. With his brother he showed the same reluctance quite to the end. For now, when the end was fast coming, he calmly foresaw it, without fear; and sending for Sir Geoffrey to come to him alone, he asked him to prop him up on his pillows, so that he might have one last look at the golden cornfields, the distant forest, and the setting sun; then quietly taking his brother's hand in his, he said feebly—

"Dear old Geoff! you have been a right-good friend, and kind as ever to the last; don't let the women fret about me, old fellow; comfort them, and tell them I know that I'm going, but I go gladly. I never could have enjoyed a day's happiness without my Nan;

and, besides, when I'm gone, you can't any longer refuse my help. It isn't a very big fortune that I've got to leave you; but it's all yours, old chap. You know I never was much of a screw or a skin-flint, or it might have been lots more; but it'll be enough to take you back to the old Chace, where you, and yours shall spend many, many happy days again, and sometimes, give a thought to your old broken-down brother, and our dear Nan."

A quiet pressure of the hand was all the answer, for the brother dared not trust himself to speak; a mist came before his eyes, and a thickness in the throat, as the other resumed still more faintly—

"I'm sure you won't grudge what I gave away, old fellow, and you won't call me an old fool for so often forgiving my debtors; because God will now perhaps forgive us ours; and—and—you won't forget my old

pensioners, Geoff, will you ? and, Perkins, he's a cross-grained old man, but as faithful as a dog, and I shouldn't like him to go out of the family, and " (with an involuntary shudder) " and Reeve—if he can't get a place —take him on—Geoff—when—I'm gone—" his breath came slowly and fitfully as he spoke these last words, and the suffering it caused him to name this man was painfully evident; he leaned back and closed his eyes, and his lips moved in prayer or in silent communing with the dead. After a long pause he roused again enough to say, "good night, Geoff—good—night. I'm very—very tired—say—good-night for—me to the dear—kind wife and—the girlies. I can't—see—them any more—to—night—good—night."

* * * * *

And when he had said this, he fell asleep !

CHAPTER IX.

'TWAS the early spring-tide when a large dark barouche, in which sat three ladies in deep mourning, escorted by two gentlemen on horseback, entered the lodge gate of the Chace, and wended slowly up through the avenue towards the house, often pausing for a few minutes at some well-remembered point. Each conspicuous tree, as it came in view, seemed to them like an old friend from whom they had been long parted; and it was with an involuntary sigh that they noted how two or three had been scarred with lightning, how some others were dying "from the head downwards" (as foresters say), others quite bare—to whom

the spring would come in vain, and some few gone; slain by the woodman's axe, so that their place would know them no more.

The roadway was again partially grass-grown, and vast straggling brambles had stretched their long thorny arms out of the thickets and planted colonies of roots in the matted and tangled grass.

A hare got up almost under the horses' feet, and scudded away in abject, and, evidently, unusual terror. The wood pigeons gave a many-voiced "coo," and rose in a cloud from the trees; the cuckoo's note came with a wondrous distinctness for once, and then sounded like the mocking echo of itself in the remote distance; mavis and merle uttered shrill cries of alarm and scuttled off amongst the dead leaves with a startling rapidity; a snake uncoiled itself from its warm corner and sneaked away in silent terror; Nature felt herself affronted and in-

vaded, and the clouds sympathised with her by shedding down a shower of April tears.

The horsemen cantered on along the turf verge, and sending their horses to the stable by the *semper-virens* "Joe" (who was on the alert, as ever), sheltered in the porch until the ladies drove up. By the time they had handed them out the shower was over, and the sun blazed brighter than ever. Before entering, therefore, they walked round the forecourt to have a good look at the outside of the dear old house.

Time had made its mark on this, as well as on the trees, for it had a considerably more weather-beaten look than they remembered in the old time. The stone-work was cracky, and loosened here and there; the coats of paint on the window-frames had worn themselves threadbare; some panes of glass were broken; some slates displaced on the roof; one of the gutters carried the water

eccentrically, and in quite an improper direction; whilst two of the chimneys had cocked their pots o' one side with a very rakish "Won't go home till morning" air.

Then they entered, and, with keenly observant eyes, criticised the internal condition of things. Many small defacements were there also visible; and the ladies felt as sorry to see them as if some old friends had been scratched, and battered, and bruised. Sir Geoffrey smiled, a somewhat rueful smile, at the forecast that the house would have to be given up to workmen before they could return to it finally.

The agents, in whose hands it had been left, had let it, furnished, to several families of distinction, *seriatim*. Unfortunately, "families of distinction" do just as much damage as indistinct families; in fact, it is a distinction without a difference. Happily,

there had been "no thieves to break through and steal;" but the "moth and dust which corrupt," had worked sad havoc with the delicate sea-green silk curtains, and their exquisite embroidery was scored and shredded cruelly. The families of distinction had evidently sat very hard on the embroidered silk chairs, and scrabbled them into single-thread-bareness in most of the more prominent places, so that the dingy flannel undergarment was obtrusively visible—like the "laste taste in life" of "Hamlet's" shirt.

Lady Langdale's quick eyes saw that some few of the choicest pieces of old china were missing from the ebony cabinets; and the girls found their treasured, dainty books much defaced with snuff and smelling of tobacco smoke. The white and gold of the furniture was a good deal chipped; the carpets were thick with dust, and did not bear sunshine at all well.

Sir Geoffrey took no heed of any of these interior matters beyond seeing, with great gladness, that the screen, from which he had cut his wife's portrait, was still there. Gilbert had wandered out to the stables and the vinery, to see if old "Daddy" was still in the land of the living; on his return to the dining-room, a modest little lunch-basket was brought in, and they sat down to enjoy, very thoroughly, their first simple meal again in the old house.

Gilbert reported the stables and vineries to be in a greater state of dilapidation than the house, but old Daddy to be scarcely at all the worse for wear. Whereupon old Daddy was immediately sent for, and came shuffling up, hiding himself as much as he could behind Joe, who, with a fine natural instinct, had scented sherry and spare sandwiches from afar and did not care to be left out in the cold when anything of that kind

was probable. Except for a wilder and more unkempt growth of dingy-grey hair, and a few more dirty lines about the mouth and eyes, old Daddy was, indeed, in a fine state of preservation, and as he gulped down his wine, grinned horribly with what he probably intended to be a smile of pleasure and gratitude.

Queer old Daddy! Whilst he stood blinking in the bright sunshine on the lawn, and furtively licking his lips, he suggested Caliban, to the life; but when his visage sunk into its stolid stupidity he closely resembled a peripatetic mummy.

Our friends were thankful for something to laugh at, for the feelings with which they were now revisiting their home were largely tinged with sadness. Death had darkened for ever the bright and kindling eyes of those they loved so dearly, and silenced for ever the kind voices and the gay laugh;—the

places where they had met them seemed strangely hollow and empty; and although the lesser causes of regret, after this, were very mean and pitiful, yet the evidence that their household gods had been contemptuously ill-treated by strangers, added its little sum of sadness to that which was too much already. They felt it, therefore, almost a relief to mount and away again; carefully avoiding, both in coming and going, the scene of that terrible tragedy of last year.

Life is too short for prolonged regrets. Deepest sorrows fade away in time; and it is well; for sorrow dulls action, and action is at once the destiny and the duty of our race.

When mellow autumn had come round again, with its cleared hay-fields and golden corn harvests, its rich fruitage, its glowing tints, and its first slight shower of falling leaves, the Langdales were once more finally installed at the Chace, and were beginning to

forget that they had ever been away from it. All the intervening time and its events were fading away into dreamland, for a happy Present had succeeded to the Past with glad promise of a happier Future. Much owing to the wordly-wise counsel of Sir George Blandville, Fallington's affairs had been, to some extent, disentangled, and the estates were beginning to yield something more than the encumbrance absorbed, with a speedy prospect of further improvement; and as Mrs. Langdale had left the whole of her private fortune to be equally divided between Gilbert and his two sisters, Mildred's share of that was sufficient to justify Sir Geoffrey in consenting to her marriage with the once fickle, but now most faithful suitor.

Pierce and Gilbert had been associated by Sir Geoffrey with himself as partners in the old City house, now known as the firm of "Sir Geoffrey Langdale, Son, and Falconer,"

and although the association of a man of science, a soldier, and a poet, was perhaps the queerest team that was ever harnessed to the wheels-within-wheels of a city merchant's business, still they pulled well together and by the aid of a well-paid and faithful staff of experienced managers and clerks, the coach was neither upset nor broken-down.

But now Mr. Pierce was on the eve of a still closer, and more delightful partnership with the great house of Langdale and Son; a partnership in which Langdale and Daughter were more concerned.

The day for the double wedding was named and near, and all the delightful perplexities about charming dresses and "loves" of hats, and ribbons and laces, were in full swing, and all sorts of mysterious "tryings-on" of this, and that, and t'other took place. Secret councils were held, and

judgments arrived at, rescinded, and reversed, to the extreme tantalization of the menfolk, who would far rather have had the ladies of their love out riding or driving, or boating with them all day long—from morn to dewy eve; not but that there was a fair, and perhaps quite a sufficient, amount of this part of the programme also; but "much would have more" in such cases.

Whilst together, how the time raced away! When apart, how it seemed to stand still! Hours became moments, and moments hours, until, at last, came the all-eventful day—a day of happiest augury; for the sun shone forth from the earliest morning with a radiant brightness, as though it rejoiced in awakening the two lovely brides-elect.

A deliciously bracing south-eastern wind came cantering over the fields, shaking the branches of the trees with a rushing laughter, and making all the little leaves clap their

hands with gladness; and well might Nature be glad, for two of her fairest creations, now in the full and glorious prime of womanhood, stept forth that morning on to the soft green velvet lawn to greet their friends.

Some rain had fallen in the night, so that there was no dust to soil or mar the simply ravishing toilettes of the brides; and as they walked up the centre aisle of the grey old Abbey, a hushed murmur of unfeigned admiration came from the good folks of the neighbourhood who had thronged the seats.

Courtly old Dr. Maxwell, point-device as ever, assisted by the vicar and his curate, read the marriage service with a deep impressiveness, adding to it a few earnest words of holy counsel, followed by a fervent benediction, which came straight from the heart to the lips. After the needful signatures in the vestry, and the subdued semi-clerical, and rather forced badinage in that semi-

clerical place, the procession was re-formed, the carriages received again their lovely ladies and gallant gentlemen, the horses pranced away merrily, and for some people, at least, that long and pleasant drive back to the Chace was absolutely perfect.

As the gay cavalcade entered the lodge-gates a ringing cheer welcomed them home, for the villagers had, of course, been invited to a feast on the lawn, and had flocked down to the gates to give their first greeting.

I trust none of my lady readers will require to be informed that Mary Grahame was one of the bridesmaids, and the only one of whom Mr. Gilbert was at all conscious. As to the other three, although they were charmingly pretty, and exquisitely costumed, that infatuated young gentleman is suspected of never having seen them at all, for he could no more tell how or in what they were

dressed than I could. O'Sullivan, however, made up for this remissness by making hot love to all three, sometimes one after another, sometimes all together, and getting himself thereby into the direst scrapes, simply for the fun of getting out of them. Upon this undignified proceeding, two coldly correct, and rather languid-eyed dandies of the Guards (whom Fallington had brought down), looked with extreme surprise, but finding that if they did not come out of their deadly-liveliness they would be merely ignored, they thawed themselves with champagne and "pawsitively" committed a few feeble "merrie jestes" of a mild and heavy order; and, once or twice, smiled "audibly."

Now, as these men were handsome to look at, and as there was no one else to flirt with, two of the bridesmaids philosophically made the best of them, *pro. tem.*, because, although

three to one was very pleasant for the "one," it was not particularly interesting for the "three." O'Sullivan was in great request at the breakfast as one of the chief spokesmen. This part he performed admirably, for natural *gaieté de cœur*, and a headlong audacity are excellent qualifications for light social speeches, where the matter is "no matter," and the *manner* everything. Sir George Blandville was also a practised and elegant speaker. Sir Geoffrey always spoke tersely and to the purpose; Dr. Noulaiton, with the skill and tact of a Frenchman, and Dr. Maxwell, with a classical style and some attic salt; hence that which is generally a nuisance and a weariness on such occasions, became quite a pleasant intellectual tournament.

When the speeches had all been disposed of, O'Sullivan amused us with the following description, in doggrel rhyme, of one of his

many small adventures during his recent visit to Ireland :—

"'Twas the Second of April, the year?—Never mind,
Sure who cares a fig for dry dates,
When once we have left Father Time far behind?
Don't let's wait for him—he nivir waits!

"'Twas the Second of April! I say that once more,
Although the assertion seems stale,
Yet plase don't believe me a blundering bore,
Because it's the head of my tale.

"All Fool's Day had past, and yet by the post
Came a parcel that looked like a present,
And my man brought it up with the coffee and toast,
And I said to myself 'Ah! that's pleasant!'

"I wonder what sweet little bright Irish girl,
Has at last looked with favour on me,
Is it 'studs,' or a ring, or a pin, or a curl?
Hoorroo! I'll untie it and see.

"So I undid the ribbon with reverent touch,
And the papers, of which there were ten,
Expecting, and hoping, and wondering much,
But what do you think I found then?

"Why! the nasty stale crust of a gooseberry tart,
That I couldn't have eaten at school,
And to add to the sorrow that went to my heart,
Where the fruit had once been was writ 'Fool!'

"So my coffee was cold, but my temper was hot,
I was mystified, bothered and fierce,
Till all of a sudden I knew I could "spot"
The sender, with carte for her tierce.

"So I sent to the pastry-cook near the hotel
For a similar gooseberry tart,
Not only the crust, but the fresh fruit as well,
Packed safely with pastry-cook's art,—

"In an illigant casket all Cupids and doves,
And daintily ribboned and sealed
As though it contained a whole legion of loves,
But these were the words it revealed:

"Ladye, this donation crusty,
I may not unrequited leave,
(Although, good sooth, 'twas almost musty,
And should have reached me yester-eve),
Yet still, with grateful fire I burn,
And prove it by this tart return.
E'en in the fruit behold the golden rule,
Of good for evil—Gooseberry for 'fool.'

"This missive despatched by my trusty man, Terry,
I was aisy and blithe as a bird,
For I knew it would help to make dinner-time merry,
And 'tis pleasant to have the last word.

"Saucy Kathleen shammed sad when at dinner we met,
Och! she looked a divine little martyr,
But her brother said 'Kathie, my dear, don't forget,
With your Tart, you have sure caught a Tartar.'"

Whilst we were still laughing at, and with him, over this escapade, the sound of wheels was heard outside and the travelling carriages drew up.

There was a soft and gentle flutter amongst the ladies ; a perceptible sensation, quite other than that of light mirth, out of respect for which, light mirth hushed itself ; whispered words of love passed between Lady Langdale and her daughters, and glistening eyes and trembling lips told of the parting hour. Sir Geoffrey tried hard to look severe and unmoved, but could not quite manage it, and every one present felt touched by that fine chord of sympathy which vibrates with an undertone of sadness through life's fairest joys.

Meantime another chord of sympathy had been touched and other whispered words of love had been spoken between Gilbert and Mary Grahame. To his ecstatic delight he found that the shadowy rival, whom he had so long hated, possessed no substantive existence whatever, but was

merely an eccentric creation of Mrs. Helmore's brain, purposely conjured up to put him through what that good lady conceived to be a proper probation. Mary now confessed that Mrs. Helmore had for some time past confided to her that Gilbert was her prime favourite, and that she intended to leave all her property to him on this one sole delightful condition, which he had now forestalled. Thereupon Mr. Gilbert felt the most vehement desire first to clasp Mary in his arms and seal the condition with a kiss, utterly reckless of time, place, circumstance, and surroundings; and then to go and perform the same absurd ceremony with Mrs. Helmore. Fortunately for his reputation for sanity, he, by a great effort, controlled both those wild impulses—for a time.

So now the brides descending in their studiously plain, but exquisitely tasteful,

travelling costumes, the hour of parting had dwindled down to its last minutes—minutes strangely chequered with smiles, and tears, and kisses. A ringing cheer, over and over repeated, followed them down the park road, and away through the gates as they drove out ;—then, two bright rays of sunshine seemed to have left the place—and a great yearning arose in the mother's heart, and a dark shadow fell across the father's path.

* * * * * *

"All gone—dispersed like a dream—and the great house still as death. No sound of gay laughter from any of its chambers, no one to expect 'home' any more."

With such thoughts passing through their minds, Lady Langdale and Sir Geoffrey stand watching the last rays of the autumn sunset dying on the lake, until a rough chill

wind comes sweeping up, tearing at all the loose leaves and hurling them to the ground;—then, with an involuntary shiver, they enter the empty house and sit sadly and quietly over a smouldering fire, with Retrospect and Forecast for their only companions.

"Shadows, oh, dear Shadows, that never more can pass,
Between the sun and earth, to cast your shadows on the grass,
We rejoice for you in trustful hope, to think that you are gone
To the Garden of fair Eden, with no shadow on its lawn"

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